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FRANCIS OF ASSISI

FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Apostle of Poverty

BY

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TO

The Memory
of
My Father and Mother

8-20-11

PREFACE

MANY BOOKS have been written about Francis of Assisi. All, of necessity, have given some consideration to his adoption of voluntary poverty, especially as it involved the economic issues of his times. No study of scholarly comprehensiveness has undertaken to interpret the full significance which he attached to poverty. He was concerned not only with its economic aspects, but also with its fuller connotation for the total surrender of things immaterial as well as material. (I have tried to set forth from the sources the all-encompassing demands which the ideal of poverty made upon one who felt himself called to be Christ's special apostle of renunciation.)

[Not what his ideal became in later hands but what it meant in his own apostleship is the main theme of this book.]

Francis never made poverty an end in itself; but everything that he thought and did had reference to the means by which he surrendered himself more fully to Christ for a world apostolate. It has been my primary object to let Francis live and speak for himself in the atmosphere and within the forms of thought and language suitable to his world. Critical appraisal of his place in history must follow, not precede, a receptive hearing of this man who responded heroically to an exacting ideal in the midst of practical, enviroing circumstances.

[My thanks are due a number of scholars who have read all or a part of the book in manuscript and have made valuable criticisms and suggestions. I am especially indebted to Professor John T. McNeill of the University of Chicago for encouragement and scholarly counsel over a period of years. Invaluable co-operation has been rendered by the library staffs of the University of Chicago, Harvard University, the Library of Congress, Boston Public Library, Duke

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R. C. P.

Duke University
June 16, 1941

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FRANCIS OF ASSISI

CHAPTER I

THE IDEAL OF RENUNCIATION

VOLUNTARY POVERTY has laid its claim upon seekers after spiritual perfection throughout the Christian ages. Some have sought in material dispossession the basic character of renunciation. To others, the acceptance of poverty has meant the fullest possible surrender of spirit, will, and body in addition to the repudiation of economic goods.

Few, if any, after Jesus himself have exemplified such total renunciation as did Francis of Assisi. The poverty which this humble man adopted was as close an approximation to that of Christ as he could discover and apply. Critical problems in great number make it difficult for the modern scholar to determine the exact nature of Jesus' thought and action concerning renunciation. Francis' unquestioning acceptance of the traditional sayings and deeds of the Christ permitted no ultimate doubt as to the Master's position. The essential character of Jesus' voluntary poverty as Francis interpreted it and upon which he based his own is, therefore, not too difficult of reconstruction.

This Jesus of the Gospels and of Christian tradition was born in lowly circumstances and grew to manhood in humble surroundings (Luke 2:7). His whole life exemplified the full renunciation which he lauded in the Beatitudes. He practiced poverty of spirit and of holdings. He followed his own injunction to meekness, pacific ministry, and forgiving love under persecution (Matt. 5:3-12, 38-48; Luke 6:20-38). Material power and wealth seemed to Him a doubtful and temporary boon which should be gladly relinquished for more enduring possessions (Luke 6:20-38). He reversed the ordinary appraisal of men as he pitied the rich and felicitated

the poor (Luke 6:20, 24). The only man who truly possessed anything was the one who voluntarily surrendered his earthly treasures and worldly solitudes, his own will and personal desires, for the laying hold upon eternal things (Matt. 6:19-34, Luke 12:15-34).

Jesus advised his followers to give upon request (Matt. 5:42) and required that his disciples go on journey without gold, silver, or reserve supplies of food and clothing (Matt. 10:5-10; Mark 6:8-9; Luke 9:2-5, 10:4). He also insisted that the only way to self-preservation and personal security was through the unqualified surrender of the self. The follower who professed to believe in the supremacy of spiritual values must be prepared to sever the most intimate family ties, to repudiate completely their hold upon him (Matt. 10:37-42, Luke 14:26). One who assumed the Master's way must expect to save himself only when he lost himself. His way of renunciation did not stop with its denial of material resources; it called for willingness to sacrifice life itself (Matt. 16:24-26, Luke 17:33, John 12:25).

To be sure, Jesus laid these full requirements upon those only who professed a more than casual support of his ideals. But to such followers He permitted no relative loyalty. When aspirants to the perfect life inquired the price of their devotion, He did not conceal its costliness. He made an absolute demand which permitted of no compromise; it required, first of all, the surrender of that which the candidate might well be inclined to reserve until the last. When, therefore, a good man manifested a yearning for perfection, Jesus required the renunciation of his most prized possession—his wealth (Matt. 19:16-26). In such cases Jesus was inexorable. He did not go about attacking the rich. But He did know, and said with candor, that it was difficult for a rich man to value anything more highly than his money.

It will be noted later that the greater number of Christians equated renunciation with material dispossession. Super-

ficially regarded, Jesus' teachings seemed to do just that. But many others, and Francis especially, saw that voluntary poverty merely started at this point; it was consummated in the complete renunciation of the whole self. Jesus warned, of course, that the love of possessions led on to a state of blind acquisitiveness which smothered the true life of the soul. The good seed of the kingdom was crowded out by worldly cares (Matt. 13:22, Mark 4:19). No man could serve both God and Mammon (Luke 16:13). Each demanded an all-consuming loyalty. A man must choose between them. The greatest danger to one who had was that he could not be content without more (Luke 12:15-31). He who put wealth before humane considerations lost his eternal soul (Luke 16:19-31). In the ultimate realm of the spirit the most fully renounced soul stood first (Mark 10:31, Luke 13:30). Jesus and his followers were judged not by the banquets which they gave the rich but by their services to the poor and humble. They were sent not to be ministered unto but to minister (Mark 10:40-45). Jesus himself felt called, as Isaiah of old, to preach the Gospel to the poor (Luke 4:17-19, Isa. 61:1). Those most true to Him were those who gave themselves most unselfishly for the least of his *little people* (Matt. 25:34-46).

Other men had riches or sought them. Jesus had not even a place to lay his head. He ended on the Cross a career of self-abnegation, which was as total as it was unselfish. He renounced his own will and his own life for others in liberating poverty of spirit.

This, then, was the wholly renounced life upon which Francis sought to pattern his own. No other influence even approached that which the man of Galilee exercised upon him. Nonetheless, one must see something of the application put upon Christ's ideal of renunciation by his followers before Francis, if one would appreciate the poverty apostolate of this special follower of the Master.

It is not within the scope or purpose of this chapter to survey in detail the significant movements and creative influences, however indirect, which lay behind, and prepared the way for, Francis. That has been done to a large degree and in estimable fashion by Miss E. S. Davison.¹ What will be attempted here is a brief orientation in the problems which most persistently faced Christ's followers before Francis, and an introduction to Francis' apostolate as it related both to Jesus' poverty and to that of other Christians after Christ.

Jesus' legacy of the poor life was, in time, to prove a challenging, if somewhat embarrassing, bequest to his followers. Perhaps few of the earliest Christian brotherhood which was formed after his death were endangered by riches. There was a tendency to share common resources on a basis of need, although private property was not proscribed (Acts 4:32, 5:4). The dynamic missionary Paul leveled no denunciation against the rich but called upon Christians to be industrious, alert against covetousness, and responsive to fraternal needs (II Thess. 3:8-10, I Thess. 4:6-11, I Cor. 5:10-14, II Cor. 9). He recalled the more than economic renunciation of One who, though He was rich, became voluntarily poor for humanity's sake (II Cor. 8:9).

As the Christian church became more widely distributed in the Mediterranean world, its members extended the range of their economic activities, diversified their holdings, and gave all too free rein to acquisitive interests. The church was gradually being transformed from a struggling, evangelical association of primitive organization and slender resources into a consolidated institution with growing temporalities. Already in the first and early second centuries, voices were raised in warning and protest. The author of I Peter (5:2-4)

¹ *Forerunners of Saint Francis and Other Studies* (New York, 1927). Consult also the useful historical background and copious source references in S. J. Turner, *The Vow of Poverty* (Washington, D. C., 1929). V. D. Scudder, *The Franciscan Adventure* (New York, 1931), pp. 1-45, is quite helpful.

inveighed sharply against filthy lucre. James, in a second-century work emphasizing practical religion, lashed out against the oppressors of the poor and anticipated joyfully the ruin of the rich (1:9-11, 2:1-13, 4:1-4, 5:1-6). Another second-century work, concerned with the organizational problems of Christianity, bluntly declared that "the desire of money is the root of all evils" (1 Tim. 6:6-11).²

Christian poverty idealists from Jesus to Francis emphasized most that phase of Christ's renunciation which pertained to material possessions. This was not so much the result of a distorted appreciation as it was the consequence of growing church wealth and the challenging problems which it entailed. The church, once largely ignored and then persecuted because of its threatening divergence from state and society, soon celebrated its triumph by an increasing adjustment of its ideals and resources to non-Christian ends. The process of secularization, begun before Constantine, went rapidly forward under his policy of strengthening the church that it might become conducive to the good fortunes of the state. Endowments, immunities, and an expanding and often predatory officialdom tempered the church's affection for Christian renunciation. The literature of the first five Christian centuries reflects simultaneously the ever-growing involvement of Christians in economic and social affairs and the stubborn retreat of those who tried to hold up Christ's ideals of renunciation against the pressure of mounting wealth.³

² Valuable discussions on the economic implications of Jesus' teachings and the gospel ethic, as well as pertinent analyses of the evolving Christian attitudes on poverty and wealth, are found in E. Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, tr. Olive Wyon (New York, 1931), I, 51 ff.; S. J. Case, *The Social Triumph of the Ancient Church* (New York, 1933), pp. 39-95; and R. Kötzschke, *Allgemeine Wirtschaftsgeschichte des Mittelalters* (Jena, 1924), pp. 170-172. See H. Leclercq, "Accusations contre les Chrétiens," *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, I (Paris, 1907), 300-303.

³ On the church's enrichment and articulation with social life in the first five centuries, consult esp. A. Dopsch, *The Economic and Social Foundations of European Civilization* (New York, 1937), pp. 241-250; A.

Such writers as Hermas, Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, and Chrysostom never ceased to warn in Christ's name against the insidious lure of riches. Christians were exhorted to subordinate economic resources to a ministry of service; to seek nothing temporal; to be the masters rather than the slaves of money; and to defeat iniquitous acquisitiveness with a responsive stewardship of wealth to the economic needs of all men. The more uncompromising spirits were quick to demand voluntary poverty for those who would follow Jesus. Others, of whom Clement of Alexandria was an early representative, pointed out that riches in themselves were not wrong, but that the misuse and inordinate desire of them was what Christ had condemned. This much discussed problem received extended treatment by Augustine, who declared for conscientious dedication of wealth to Christian ends even while he exalted poverty as the ideal state of those who would give themselves fully to the demands of Christian perfection.⁴

At the continuing suggestion of such leaders as Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine, Christianity lent itself to a double way. Average Christians might without violence to Christ's precepts live in reasonable adjustment to secular life. Others who sought, like the rich young man, the way of perfection

Hyma, *Christianity, Capitalism, and Communism: A Historical Analysis* (Ann Arbor, 1937), pp. 1-13; Kötzschke, *op. cit.*, pp. 170-171.

⁴ See representative Patristic emphases in Hermas, *The Pastor*, Bk. I, Vision III, chap. vi, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (hereinafter referred to as ANF), II, 15; Tertullian, *Of Patience*, VII, ANF, III, 711, 712; Clement of Alexandria, *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* ANF, II, 591-604; Cyprian, *Treatise III: On the Lapsed*, XII, ANF, V, 440; Ambrose, *Duties of the Clergy*, Bk. I, chaps. ix, xxviii, xxxii, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (hereinafter referred to as NPNF), 2d Ser., X, 6, 22, 38; Chrysostom, *Homily LI*, NPNF, 1st Ser., XI, 307; *Homily XXXIII*, NPNF, XIV, 118, 518; Augustine, *The City of God*, I, 8, 10, 29, and XV, 22, in NPNF, 1st Ser., II, 5, 7, 19, 303; *On Christian Doctrine*, I, 3-4, NPNF, 1st Ser., II, 523; *Sermons on New Testament Lessons*, XXXV, XXXVI, NPNF, 1st Ser., VI, 367-368. See also C. J. Cadoux, *The Early Church and the World* (Edinburgh, 1925), pp. 446-450.

must follow in poverty His counsels of complete renunciation. This, the Fathers hastened to add, involved surrender of the whole will as well as of all outer possessions.⁵

In this working compromise, which operated within a practical society, monasticism played an increasingly large part. It was considered more and more as the natural refuge and support of those who maintained that unbending loyalty to renunciation which was now denied by a realistic world to Christians in general.⁶

This duality of life led to a marked contrast in the Middle Ages between the growing wealth of the church as a whole and the poverty idealism which seekers after Christian perfection sought to keep alive. It, therefore, becomes advantageous to see, first, what the church experienced in the way of economic involvement and, second, what success was attained by those advocates of renunciation who lived in religious community. Both of these factors held large significance for Francis' way of life.

The sixth-century church was intimately identified with social and economic life throughout the Western world. The same unsettled conditions which attended the rise to power of Germanic peoples provided outlet for the economic ingenuities of the church. In such representative areas as Gaul, Spain, and Italy, the church was extending her patrimonies and adding to her wealth. The declining vigor of the Western Empire thrust the Bishop of Rome into a vantage position of economic power and social prestige. In Gaul, likewise, the episcopate was as economically and politically powerful as the Frankish church was affluent. Monastic pro-

⁵ See Ambrose, *Duties of the Clergy*, II, 11, NPNF, 2d Ser., X, 7; Jerome, *Epist. Ad Hedibiam*, CXX, in Migne, *Patrologia Latina* (hereinafter referred to as MPL), XXII, 984-85; Augustine, *Epist.* CCXI, MPL, XXXIII, 958 f., 960 f., *Serm.* CCCLV, CCCLVI, MPL, XXXIX, 1568 f., 1574 f. Cf. F. Glaser, *Die Franziskanische Bewegung* (Stuttgart, 1903), pp. 1-8.

⁶ See Troeltsch, *op. cit.*, I, 115-118; U. Berlière, *L'ordre monastique des origines au XIII^e siècle* (3d ed.; Paris, 1924), p. 2.

tests against secularization availed little in the face of the bishops' dominance and their own frequent laxity.

From the sixth through the eighth century, the essential elements of feudalism were being brought into combination. From the ninth to the thirteenth, feudal organization was primary in the civilization of the West. The church became feudalized at an early date. The humblest priest and the mightiest bishop alike took their places in this society of decentralized, landed power and of personal services and obligations.

In Charles Martel's day, and in the time of Charlemagne, the church and its resources were capitalized for the purposes of the state. Church lands were expropriated, restored, and augmented at the will of seculars. Charlemagne and his successors pressed both bishops and abbots into service as diplomats and field generals. High ecclesiasts, regular and secular, were at the same time vassals and lords with great manorial estates, villeins, and serfs. As such they gave the customary military and financial services, and in turn increased their holdings from royal gifts and the payments of nobles subservient to them. Opportunities for economic aggrandizement and commercial exploitation were not overlooked.

With Carolingian decline, the royal tendency of making gratuitous and forced grants to grasping ecclesiasts led to an impoverished monarchy and an always wealthier church. German kings, Otto I in particular, sought to strengthen themselves in alliance with the clergy against the lay nobility. Bishops received immunities and rich feudalities direct from the king. Utilitarian concern bound them more closely to his desires than to that of the church itself. They paid taxes, supplied soldiers, and even fought personally at his behest. Among these princes of the church were some of the best loved and most hated men of the times. Monasteries and their abbots deserted the church prohibitions against worldly business to multiply riches. They frequently gave full feudal

services and profited from a wide range of feudal and manorial income. Monasteries and nunneries were often under the direction of lay abbots and abbesses.

In the tenth and eleventh centuries, as throughout most of Christian history, the church was more effective in fitting itself to the environmental pattern than it was in upholding the precepts and counsels of Christ in constructive criticism of society. Men who led Christian lives were not absent from the secular and regular clergy. Yet their call to reform was almost lost in the bickerings and barterings of an already wealthy church. In the eleventh-century investiture struggle, landed wealth was the actual bone of contention. Hildebrand, with all his spiritual vitality, could not claim the church's feudal rights without being reminded of her feudal obligations. The church had no intention then, or later, of heeding those prophetic voices who insisted that she maintain her spiritual power by surrendering her physical possessions. No such compromise as that of 1122 could solve the problem. The bishops and the church at large continued their career of feudal accumulation and spiritual decadence.⁷

The twelfth-century clergy vied with each other for lucrative positions and made their moral transgressions a topic of household conversation. The hierarchy denounced prevalent temporal abuses and, in almost the same breath, authorized ruinous appropriations to be exacted from the poor for the erection of magnificent edifices. A wide disparity existed between the ideals of economic life held up by canonists and theologians and the devious practices by which the church itself entered into the commerce, trade, and moneyed economy fostered by the crusades. The church, with its increasing

⁷ The obscure beginnings of feudalism and the significance of its rise for church and society as a whole are carefully set forth in Dopsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 283-303. On the growing wealth and feudalization of the church see J. T. McNeill, "The Feudalization of the Church," *Environmental Factors in Christian History* (Chicago, 1939), pp. 187-206. Cf. J. W. Thompson, *Feudal Germany* (Chicago, 1928), pp. 1-68; Thompson, *Economic and Social History of the Middle Ages* (New York, 1928), pp. 647-699.

need of exchange facilities, was a factor in the rise of modern banking. The complex papal system, with its huge revenues and heavy expenditures, made imperative the construction of that imposing financial organization already taking shape in the time of Innocent III. The "camera apostolica" might not inappropriately have been styled "mater pecuniarum."

As a great feudal and monetary power, the church had to modify its economic teachings to suit practical circumstances. The denunciation of usury and moneylending rarely extended to those most guilty of such practices. Kings, feudal lords, bishops, and abbots were not greatly interfered with in their transactions of big business. Popes regularly utilized international banking houses and even protected their rights.⁸

In the centuries under review, men traveled in ever-increasing numbers along the highway of ordinary Christian living. Were there no protests and no propaganda in the name of renunciatory perfection as it was lived along the narrow road? There were scattered hermits, an unknown number of secular clerics who pleaded for reform, and an heretical challenge to the proud church so far withdrawn from Christ. Those, however, who had been especially commissioned to follow voluntary poverty on the narrow way of Christian perfection were the members of religious communities, i.e., the canons and the monks.

St. Augustine was the inspiration of the medieval canons and the real father of their way of life. He, like Eusebius of Vercellae, had instituted community of life, according to rule, for the clerics of his cathedral in Africa. The exact rule which he laid down is now somewhat difficult of reconstruction. The major elements which went into its composition are, however, fairly clear. They included individual poverty

⁸ The economic theory of the medieval church, its practice, and the contrast between the two may be studied in Hyma, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-16; R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (New York, 1926), pp. 16-55; A. Fanfani, *Catholicism, Protestantism and Capitalism* (New York, 1935), esp. pp. 119-182.

in a life where moderate possessions were to be wholly common.⁹ His rule underwent various mutilations and reconstructions in the Middle Ages even as the canonical life knew periodic decline and revival at different hands and upon varying legislative bases. In the eleventh century and thereafter, a series of canonical movements based upon the so-called rule of St. Augustine reinvoked his known principles of corporate life without private property. The Austin canons, the Victorines, the Premonstratensians, and the early Dominicans were in the vanguard of these orders of canons who tried to follow the way of disciplined renunciation in the face of prevalent laxity.¹⁰

As the canons elevated Augustine's ideal of poverty, so the cenobites of medieval Europe found their basic concept of renunciation in the Rule of Benedict of Nursia. He acknowledged a debt of gratitude to the Holy Scriptures, the Lives of the Saints, and in particular to the Rules of such monastic leaders as Basil and Cassian. He, like Augustine, had no thought of prohibiting property to the religious community. Provisions regarding this, like all other matters in his beginner's guide to the more perfect life, were calculated to inspire moderation rather than severity. Private property was to be eradicated. All possessions and all wills were placed at the abbot's disposal for the common good. Not privation and suffering, but simplicity and frugality with all needs met and certain alleviations permitted was the condition antici-

⁹ See Augustine's significant *Epist.* CCXI, MPL, XXXIII, 958 (NPNF, 1st Ser., I, 563); and *Sermones*, CCCLV, CCCLVI, MPL, XXXIX, 1568 f. and 1574 f. A challenging attempt to reconstruct the Rule and to analyze and interpret the sources which went into it is made by P. Mandonnet and his collaborators in *Saint Dominique: L'idée, l'homme et l'œuvre* (Paris, 1937), II, 103-203; cf. M. Mellet, *L'itinéraire et l'idéal monastiques de saint Augustin* (Paris, 1934), pp. 53-137, esp. pp. 73-80.

¹⁰ An exhaustive treatment of these and other orders of canons who followed the Augustinian Rule is available in M. Heimbucher, *Die Orden und Kongregationen der katholischen Kirche* (3d ed.; Paderborn, 1933), I, 396 ff.

pated. No "naked following of the naked Christ" but a fair balance between rigorism and laxity was enjoined.¹¹

The Benedictines did not long keep this golden mean. The order became thoroughly feudalized and shockingly corrupt. Ninth- and tenth-century monasteries exhibited more fondness for worldly business than for spiritual interests. Great wealth was followed by shattered discipline and general laxity.¹²

In the meantime the Benedictine Order gave rise to reform movements. Cluny in its origins was a balanced, moderate attempt to revive the old ideals of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and to emancipate monasticism from the evils of growing feudalism. Early abbots like Berno and Odo condemned the avaricious clergy and combated the mounting tendency to private property and excessive wealth in the religious houses. They sought to make Cluny a center of renunciation and spiritual reform in the midst of monastic decadence. This reform movement in its pristine purity, however, was short-lived. Cluny prospered; became a far-flung, feudalized order; and subjected a growing number of monasteries to her abbot. She became a powerful ally of the Hildebrandine movement to preserve the feudal holdings of the church. Her own individual monks knew little real poverty in an order which utilized vast, corporate wealth to enhance artistic magnificence and an elaborate cult. She did make undoubted contributions to cultural and religious life. She, however, not only diverged sharply from the renun-

¹¹ The implications for poverty of earlier cenobites are discussed in Turner, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-18. For the bearing of the Rule on poverty see esp. chaps. xxxiii, xxxii, in the edition of F. A. Gasquet, *The Rule of St. Benedict* (London, 1925). Cf. Heimbucher, *op. cit.*, I, 159 ff.; D. G. Morin, *L'idéal monastique et la vie chrétienne des premiers jours* (Paris, 1931), pp. 124-136.

¹² The attempt to stress the good effects of monastic wealth and to relate periods of relaxation to times of lessened material resources, as in Morin, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-130, can hardly be regarded as successful in the light of such evidence as G. G. Coulton cites in the three volumes of his *Five Centuries of Religion* (Cambridge, 1922-36).

ciatory emphasis of her early days but also intensified the grievous ills of an already wealthy church.¹³

The Cistercians, with full awareness of Cluniac enrichment, inaugurated a new, disciplined movement within the Benedictine tradition. Robert of Molesme and Stephen Harding set examples of strict personal poverty; required daily labor of all monks; and insisted upon the greatest simplicity in church buildings, equipment, and ritual. Bernard of Clairvaux remained throughout his life an exponent of personal poverty such as he believed Christ had adopted. He was an uncompromising enemy of that wealth which destroyed the poor and exalted corruption in high places. He continued to agitate for simplicity and limited resources in his own order. His bitterest attacks were launched against the rich Cluniacs. He insisted that their prosperity and splendid ritual were bars to that renunciation and humility without which man cannot approach God in true worship.¹⁴

Unfortunately, the Cistercians themselves soon fell a prey to material successes. Their feudalities multiplied. Eminence in agriculture, cattle raising, and wool trade was joined to virtual monopolies of salt springs and milling rights. Their very missionary expeditions were sometimes a blind for commercial exploitation. There were decreasing signs of their primitive ideal in the later twelfth century. The thirteenth saw an order enriched by feudal aggrandizement, and rendered alert to every advantage derivable from the new age of trade. Little social conscience and less social service lived in this ruthless corporation.¹⁵

¹³ The status of early Cluniac poverty and the order's transition from it are suggestively treated in Berlière, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-261; Thompson, *Feudal Germany*, pp. 68-128; G. de Valous, *Le monachisme Clunisien des origines au 15 siècle . . .* (Paris, 1935), I, 63-67; also Vol. II.

¹⁴ The poverty emphasis of the early Cistercians and of Bernard is discussed in Davison, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-65; E. Vacandard, *Vie de St. Bernard, abbé de Clairvaux* (4th ed.; Paris, 1910), I, 119-134; Coulton, *op. cit.*, Vol. II.

¹⁵ Thompson, *Economic and Social History*, pp. 608-646; H. d'Arbois de Jubainville, *Études sur l'état intérieur des abbayes Cisterciennes et en*

There must have been a number of devoted reformers who, like Peter Cantor, longed for the delivery of their order from the bondage of avarice and wealth to the freedom of evangelical poverty.¹⁶ One of these, Joachim of Flore, carried his criticism of spiritual delinquency to the point of stern prophecy and vigorous action. His apocalyptic hope envisaged a future age of love, liberty, and ideal monasticism when riches would be repudiated and poverty like that of Christ and his Apostles would prevail. In his own reformed monastery at Flore, he sought to honor that poverty by a rejection of all those Babylonish preoccupations with wealth, business, and trade which plagued his day. There is no conclusive evidence that his influence operated directly upon Francis of Assisi, although his doctrines were used and distorted by later Franciscans. He was a mouthpiece for many who looked for a more vigorous and sustained application of Christian renunciation than the regulars afforded.¹⁷

The church at the opening of the thirteenth century, therefore, presented a bold challenge to the ever-recurring ideal of poverty. The spontaneity and freshness of evangelical religion had little place in a highly organized church dominated by a privileged hierarchy. The very clergy, vowed to the ministry of man's spiritual needs, were obsessed by the desire for power and wealth. The masses of men were systematically exploited by means of the sacramental system which was ostensibly devoted to their salvation. Business affairs and money transactions absorbed the attention of the higher orders. Clerical delinquency in the performance of sacred duties elicited popular disapproval. Acrimonious quips and doggerel poetry evinced public dissatisfaction with sacer-

particulier de Clairvaux au XII^e et XIII^e siècles (Paris, 1858), pp. 275-281; Berlière, *op. cit.*, pp. 301-304. ¹⁶ Coulton, *op. cit.*, II, 26-30.

¹⁷ For an understanding of Joachim see E. Aegerter, *Joachim de Flore* (2 vols.; Paris, 1928); and P. Fournier, *Études sur Joachim de Flore* (Paris, 1909), esp. pp. 10, 22-23, 45-47.

dotal greed. The cleric was deemed a master in the science of "philopocunia." The financial organization of the Papacy was becoming the most efficient instrument of extortion in the Middle Ages. Jacques de Vitry was disturbed to find the Curia absorbed in secular and temporal affairs. Spiritual considerations were almost crowded out by undue interest in lawsuits, disputes, kings, and kingdoms.¹⁸

The practice of true poverty was sadly in abeyance within the old monastic orders. Monasteries were encumbered with corporate wealth. Monks dwelt apart from the world of men whose material resources they selfishly appropriated. Covetousness, litigation, and the spoliation of feudal subjects were common monastic vices. The Cistercians, who had once been intimate friends of evangelical poverty, were now more closely identified with growing capitalism than was any other order. They were charged with insatiable cupidity and with the reduction of poor people to beggary.

The wealth of the church had grown, rather than diminished, in the face of poverty idealism in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The ideal of poverty had experienced revivals as frequent as they were temporary. Nevertheless, in the thirteenth century, new voices raised the old cry of poverty. Within the church and outside it, poverty was prescribed as the cure for manifold ills. The yearning for a return to primitive spirituality was widely felt. The common people had been neglected by the selfish agents of an impersonal system. The masses now awaited spiritual ministers who would preach penitence and renunciation by their lives as well as by their words. Men longed for a religion which would reincarnate the humility, the poverty, and the charity

¹⁸ Kötzschke, *op. cit.*, pp. 534-535; Glaser, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-12; cf. Jacobi Vitriacensis de b. Francisco eiusque societate testimonia. Epistula I, in H. Boehmer, *Analekten* . . ., p. 98. For the vast financial system of the Papacy consult W. E. Lunt, *Papal Revenues in the Middle Ages* (2 vols.; New York, 1934).

of Christ. In Francis of Assisi the people witnessed an attempt at the heroic observance of poverty as lived by Christ and taught by the Gospels.¹⁹

John Bernardone, later called Francis, was born at Assisi in 1182 to a cloth merchant Pietro and his pious wife Pica.²⁰ The boy's education, which probably included rudimentary studies in Latin, the Scriptures, and arithmetic, was adequate to his part in his father's business. As a young man he showed some potentialities for such a career. He sought social relaxation as the leader of other youths in irresponsible, though fairly innocuous, revels. Sometimes in the midst of his gay extravagance, which his doting father condoned, he paused in disquiet to give alms to the poor. A haunting sense of the disparity between privilege and indigence could not be dispelled. His dreams of knighthood and military glory led to his participation in an unsuccessful campaign against neighboring Perugia. He returned from a period of imprisonment around 1203 or 1204. Another quest for honors in arms (*ca.* 1204-1205) was ended almost before it got under way. The realization dawned upon him that his struggle must be directed against spiritual rather than military objectives. Illness, romantic fancies, and a yearning for he knew not what left his soul in turmoil. His old round of pleasures palled on him. The poor and the leprous repelled him even

¹⁹ On the state of the thirteenth-century church in an age of crusades and rising capitalism consult Hyma, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-16; Tawney, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29; Köttschke, *op. cit.*, pp. 534-535. See the significant bearing of H. M. Robertson's discussion on medieval capitalism in Chapter II of his *The Rise of Economic Individualism* (Cambridge, 1933).

²⁰ Among the better biographies and interpretations of St. Francis are: P. Sabatier, *Life of St. Francis of Assisi*, tr. from the French by L. S. Houghton (New York, 1917); [cf. Sabatier's definitive edition: *Vie de St. François . . .* (Paris, 1931)]; J. Jörgensen, *St. Francis of Assisi: A Biography* (New York, 1912, 1926); Fr. Cuthbert, *Life of St. Francis of Assisi* (New York, 1912, 1913); L. Salvatorelli, *The Life of St. Francis of Assisi*, tr. from the Italian by E. Sutton (New York, 1928); M. Beaufreton, *Saint François d'Assise* (2d ed.; Paris, 1925); P. Gratien, *Histoire de la fondation et de l'évolution de l'ordre des frères mineurs au XIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1928).

while they drew him with some strange fascination to them.²¹ Thoughts of Christ's sacrificial love for, and his own selfish revulsion from, these helpless people racked his spirit. In a sequence of meaningful experiences the conviction gradually, but no less powerfully, emerged that he must renounce his own resources and give himself in poverty of spirit to the service of these people as the all-renouncing Jesus had done. Desperate experiments in the most menial service of lepers left him shaken but strangely elated. He had formerly experienced chivalrous longings to serve fair ladies. He now began to ask himself whether the greatest chivalry of all was not the ministry in Christ's name to his poor; the defense of her whom Christ himself had espoused; the love of Lady Poverty.²²

²¹ For these episodes in Francis' early career see II Cel., 3-7; I Cel., 1-6; Bon., I, 1-4; Tres Soc., 3-6. These abbreviations refer to sections in the *First* and *Second Lives* of Francis, by Thomas of Celano, to chapters and sections in the *Legenda Major* of Bonaventura, and to sections in the *Legend of the Three Companions*. The edition of Celano is that of P. Edouard Alençon, *S. Francisci Assisiensis Vita et Miracula Additis Opusculis Liturgicis Auctore Fr. Thoma de Celano* (Rome, 1906). English quotations are from a translation based upon this text by A. G. F. Howell, *The Lives of St. Francis of Assisi by Brother Thomas of Celano* (New York, 1908). The two *Lives*, written ca. 1228-29 and ca. 1244-47, constitute an invaluable compilation of early sources. In the *Second*, Celano may have been assisted by Brother Leo and other companions of the Saint. The critical edition of Bonaventura is that found in the work entitled *Seraphici Doctoris S. Bonaventurae Legendae Duae De Vita S. Francisci Seraphici Editae A. PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae* (Quaracchi, 1923). For a translation see E. G. Salter, *The Life of St. Francis* (London, 1910). This official biography, written to compose differences within the Franciscan Order, has the usual faults of a harmonizing work. When used critically, it does aid in the interpretation of Francis' life of poverty. Tres Soc. refers to the work known as Tres Socii or the *Legenda trium sociorum* (A SS, Oct. t. II, 723-724). A convenient edition is that of M. Faloci-Pulignani, *Sancti Francisci Legenda Trium Sociorum* (Fulginiae, 1898). This source, as it stands, is probably a late compilation. Though more a panegyric on poverty than a work of history, it reflects earlier sources with an artistic suggestiveness which is not without value. Like other legends it rests ultimately upon history. See E. G. Salter's translation, *The Legend of Saint Francis by the Three Companions* (London, 1905).

²² II Cel., 8; I Cel., 7; Bon., I, 5-6; Tres Soc., 6-7.

Francis broke gradually with his profligate associates. He gave generously to poor priests and poor men. On a pilgrimage to Rome, perhaps in 1206, he changed garments with a beggar and learned what it meant to solicit alms. At another time, while praying at St. Damian, he seemed to hear the crucified Christ calling him to rebuild his ruined church, to surrender himself and his resources to the divine purpose. Joyfully he put his services at the disposal of the priest; he sold merchandise and gave the funds to the cause of reconstruction; he himself carried stones for the rebuilding of this and other dilapidated churches.²³

More and more Francis' bizarre conduct evoked the derision of the villagers and the despair of his bewildered, humiliated father. Pietro now haled his son into the presence of Guido, Bishop of Assisi, that the good man might see for himself this squanderer of family resources, this voluntary intimate of beggars and outcasts. And then Francis made his choice; he publicly recorded his conversion from the ways of trade to the espousal of renunciation. In reply to his father's charges he gave up his inheritance and the very garments which he wore. He resolved hereafter to acknowledge no father but the one in heaven. As the symbol of his material and personal surrender, he traced the Cross of the Crucified on the rough garment with which the pitying bishop had covered his nakedness.²⁴

This occurred most probably around 1206. For two years he gave himself up to hermit life, the service of the poor and lepers, and the rebuilding of fallen churches.²⁵ And then on a day in 1209 came an epochal experience. As he participated in the Mass at the Chapel of the Portiuncula, he was struck with the words which the priest read and expounded from the Gospel. Christ had sent forth his Disciples without

²³ II Cel., 8, 10, 11; I Cel., 8-11; Bon., II, 1.

²⁴ I Cel., 10-15; II Cel., 12; Bon., II, 2-4; Tres Soc., 17-20.

²⁵ Cf. I Cel., 16-18, 21; Bon., II, 5-8.

gold, silver, extra clothing or provisions to preach penitence and the kingdom of God. In this commission he recognized his own specific call to an apostolate of voluntary poverty. He had now found in a blaze of divine light what he had previously groped for in near darkness. He took off his shoes; dispensed with staff, purse, and money; replaced his belt with a rope girdle; and embarked on his career of gospel poverty.²⁶ He had, before this, decided upon some form of withdrawal from the enslavement of possessions. He now had a positive program for a sacrificial apostolate.

Shortly after this, he sought further guidance from the Gospels for his first associate, Bernard of Quintavalle, and for himself. As they waited in the little church, they let the book of the Gospels open three times where it would. The first passage conditioned perfection upon selling all and giving to the poor; the second prohibited the taking of provisions on a journey; the third prescribed self-denial and cross-bearing for the unreserved followers of Christ.²⁷ To the little band who formed the earliest voluntary society of renunciation, Francis made known their special commission from Christ. They, too, must despise the things of the world; surrender body and will; and go forth to preach repentance, peace, and the coming kingdom.²⁸

Francis never doubted that he had this apostolate of complete poverty and this leadership of a few chosen brethren directly from Christ himself.²⁹ As a loyal Catholic he took

²⁶ I Cel., 21-22; Bon., III, 1-2; Tres Soc., 25. For biblical passages in, and related to, the gospel of the day (Matthew) see Matt. 10:1-42; Mark 6:7-12; Luke 9:1-6, 10:1-16. Note esp. the key references Matt. 10:7-10; Luke 10:4; 9:2-3; Mark 6:8, 12, involved in Celano's account of Francis' experience. They were to play a large role in Francis' career of poverty.

²⁷ II Cel., 15; I Cel., 24, 92, 93; Bon., III, 3; Tres Soc., 28-29.

²⁸ I Cel., 29.

²⁹ Test., 4. This reference is to Francis' *Testamentum*, available in H. Boehmer, *Analekten zur Geschichte des Franciscus von Assisi* (Tübingen, 1904), p. 37. Cf. with this edition of Francis' complete works that of L. Lemmens, *Opuscula Sancti Patris Francisci Assisiensis* (Quaracchi, 1904).

them in 1210, with their gospel formulation of life which he had drawn up, to receive the confirmation and blessing of Christ's earthly vicar. Innocent III had doubts of their ability to practice this almost superhuman renunciation of individual and collective possessions, personal will, and all else. But he could not well deny a plea to permit a living application of the Gospel itself. He, therefore, gave verbal consent to the penitents of Assisi to make trial of their vocation under Francis' guidance.³⁰ Francis had not sought the status of an order for his voluntary association. It was later to be officially recognized as such.

The ten ensuing years of apostolate deepened Francis' conviction of his calling and brought home to the people of Italy, and the lands beyond, the almost unique quality and degree of Franciscan poverty. Their rule was no adaptation of previous monastic codes; Christ's example recorded in the Gospels rather than the policies of other Religious was the criterion of their existence.³¹ Jacques de Vitry was not alone in observing (*ca.* 1220) how effectively these true Minors reproduced the poverty and humility of the primitive church and how closely they followed, in their nakedness, the naked Christ.³² Numerous monastic communities had nullified, with corporate wealth, the pledges of poverty taken by individual members. The early Franciscans made poverty applicable not merely to the individual but to the group as well. Money, revenues, lands, fixed habitation, stored provisions,

References throughout are to the Boehmer edition unless otherwise indicated.

³⁰ I Cel., 32-33; Bon., III, 9-10; I Reg., Introd. The last reference is to the all-important *Regula non bullata quae dicitur prima*, Boehmer, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

³¹ II Cel., 61.

³² *De religione et predicatione fratrum Minorum*, from the *Historia Orientalis*, I. II, c. 32, Boehmer, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-106. De Vitry, in referring to the Friars Minor, writes: ". . . quod non solum evangelica precepta, sed et consilia, vitam apostolicam expressius imitantes, modis omnibus adimplere laborant, omnibus que possident renunciantes, se ipsos abnegantes, crucem sibi tollendo, nudi nudum sequentes [Christum] . . ."

and all but the minimum use of things were objects of their voluntary denial.³³ Poverty of spirit and the crucified will were the deep-lying guarantors of that outer renunciation which all the world could see.

There were involved in Francis' mission of poverty no attack upon existing institutions, no discrimination between rich and poor, no conscious attempt at social reformation in and of itself, no plan of political upheaval or economic revolution. Francis was not trying to found a new social order, however much he may have felt the defects of the existing one. He was seeking to incarnate, for himself and for a few others specially called, Christ's renunciatory love and service for all men alike. Out of that prior loyalty to the Divine came their inevitable service to grateful humanity.

During these first ten years a second order, the Poor Clares, had emerged (1212); missions beyond the confines of Italy had included Francis' visit to the crusaders, his preaching appearance before the Sultan (1219), and his sojourn in Syria and Palestine (ca. 1220); Honorius III had definitely recognized the order and had acceded to Francis' request that it be placed under Cardinal Ugolini's protection (1220).³⁴ Permission was given Francis for the composition of a more elaborate rule. He, however, resigned his leadership, perhaps voluntarily, to Peter di Catana, who became

³³ I Reg., 1-2; I Cel., 34-44; Spec. Perf., II-XXXVI. The last reference is to chapters in the *Mirror of Perfection*. For critical editions see: *Speculum perfectionis seu, S. Fr. A. legenda antiquissima, auctore fratre Leone nunc primum edidit P. Sabatier*, Collection d'études et de documents, t. I (Paris, 1898), and Sabatier's later edition with notes, *Le Speculum Perfectionis ou mémoires de frère Léon sur la seconde partie de la vie de Saint François d'Assise* (2 vols., "British Society of Franciscan Studies," XIII and XVII, Manchester, 1928, 1931). A convenient translation is that of R. Steele, *The Mirror of Perfection* (London, 1910). The present form of this much debated work was perhaps given shape in the fourteenth century. It probably reflects some of the extreme views of the later Spirituals. Compared with Francis' own writing, it is, however, found to be true in no small degree to his ideal of poverty. It doubtless comprises some very early as well as late sources.

³⁴ I Cel., 71-75; II Cel., 25.

minister-general (in 1220). The Third Order came into being the next year.³⁵

The so-called First Rule of 1221, produced in collaboration by Francis and Caesar of Speyer, preserved the rigorous ideal of poverty which many brethren and the hierarchy held excessive. Francis could see for himself the problems which this ideal occasioned for an order grown beyond his original intentions. Not until it had undergone such modifications as the church deemed imperative did the unofficial document of 1221 receive papal approval as the definitive Rule of 1223.³⁶

Francis may have reproached himself for having permitted his chosen few to assume proportions inimical to primitive poverty. He in no way compromised his loyalty to Christ's church which could not fail, whatever the contrary evidence, to protect the poverty of Christ's special apostles. An experience declared to be that of the Stigmata brought him all the closer to the poor Christ, with whom he sought conformity (1224).³⁷ His last will and spiritual testament bequeathed simultaneously his love for uncompromising gospel poverty and his faith in Christ's church, which must surely protect it.³⁸

This legacy of total renunciation which Francis left to the

³⁵ II Cel., 143; Gratien, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

³⁶ See the editions of Boehmer and Lemmens, *op. cit.*, for the *Regula Prima* of 1221 (hereinafter referred to as I Reg.), and the *Regula bullata* of 1223 (hereinafter referred to as II Reg.). The best English translations of these and other works of Francis are those by Constance, Countess De La Warr, *The Writings of St. Francis of Assisi* (London, 1907), and P. Robinson, *The Writings of Saint Francis of Assisi, Newly Translated into English with an Introduction and Notes* (Philadelphia, 1906). The first, abbreviated as *Writings*, is the one cited unless otherwise indicated.

³⁷ Bon., XIII, 1-10; II Cel., 135. Cf. T. Okey (tr.), *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, pp. 78 ff. This charming legend, of little value in a strictly historical sense, reflects the image of the Saint and his followers borne in the hearts of humble, fourteenth-century folk. See Latin editions of these legends in *Actus beati Francisci et sociorum ejus*, ed. P. Sabatier, Collection d'études et de documents, t. IV (Paris, 1902), and *Floretum S. Francisci Assisiensis*, ed. P. Sabatier (Paris, 1902).

³⁸ Test.

little flock at his death in 1226 was distinctive in a manner and to an extent not lost upon his own and succeeding ages.³⁹ Other movements of renunciation entered into his spiritual heritage, but the poverty of Christ, which he adopted in loving imitation, was his only real guide. All too many religious associations began with Jesus' injunctions and then rationalized them to suit the pressing demands of worldly circumstances. Francis demanded of his followers a rigorous conformity to Christ's dictates with which he challenged all circumstances. Other rules than his were based upon the Bible language, but his primitive manifesto required that true Minors give literal expression to its free spirit. With few exceptions monasticism asked for individual poverty but permitted collective proprietorship. Francis prohibited all proprietorship and enforced rigorous limits to the use of everything indispensable. The Friars, too, modified their allegiance in time, but an unprecedented renunciation preceded their fall. The great orders before Francis boasted of their service to humanity but remained fixed in their habitations and largely stabilized in their ministry. The Little Brothers of Francis began their apostolate with the clear recognition that mobile responsiveness to every human need in Christ's name was the only justification for their poverty existence. They, like Christ, renounced all so that they, like him, might be free to save men. These men would support them in this freedom only so long as the Minors dispensed the resources of salvation. The people did not need to be told that this early Franciscan apostolate had transcended all such attempts since Jesus. Reformers in plenty, both orthodox and heretical, made their criticism of the institutional church the measure of their poverty idealism. But Francis saw that nothing less than humble co-operation with the church, whatever its failings, could insure total and redemptive poverty.

³⁹ See esp. Gratien, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-60, and Scudder, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-45.

For the most distinctive characteristic of Francis' poverty was its all-inclusiveness. Great leaders before him had admitted that renunciation was of the spirit as well as of things material; but their emphases upon poverty had dealt almost exclusively with stipulated externals. For Francis this gospel state of perfection must embrace all that Christ's renunciation encompassed. As an increasing number of Francis' spiritual children have testified, his poverty demanded renunciation of things, both internal and external; it surrendered the acquisitiveness of body and will, together with the affections of mind and heart. Such poverty gave up all things terrestrial and perishable; it called upon men of perfection to renounce self and all riches, whether material or immaterial.⁴⁰

Just how far-reaching Francis' poverty was, may be seen in his exaltation of it as the queen of virtues, the source, form, and foundation of them all. With Francis, poverty ceased to be regarded as economic expropriation alone and became the living symbol of liberty from all things, inner and outer. The role of such associated and indispensable virtues as humility, simplicity, and obedience, thus became at times almost indistinguishable from that of poverty. Upon occasion he thought of them as inseparable sisters of poverty; at other times they were reckoned virtually as diverse forms of it.⁴¹ He stressed the necessary interaction of all in his program of total renunciation and voluntary apostolate.

His *Laud of the Virtues* emphasizes the corporateness of that spiritual communion which Simplicity, Humility, and Obedience, among others, share with Poverty. Attack upon

⁴⁰ Poverty as fullest renunciation is eloquently interpreted by P. Gratien, *Saint François d'Assise: sa personnalité, sa spiritualité* (new ed.; Paris, 1928), pp. 96-97; and by P. Ubald D'Alençon, *L'âme franciscaine* (3d ed.; Paris, 1926), pp. 134-140.

⁴¹ Bon., VII, 1-2, 6; H. Felder, *The Ideals of St. Francis of Assisi*, tr. from the German by B. Bittle (New York, 1925), pp. 83-86; Gratien, *St. François*, p. 96. Cf. Verb. Admon., 3, 5, 14, 19, 23. The references are to Francis' *Verba Admonitionis*. See the various editions of this work in Boehmer, Lemmens, De La Warr, and Robinson.

one brings injury to, and the loss of, all. Possession of one without offense to the others insures possession of all. Together they strengthen the program of renunciation in which pure simplicity destroys worldly and carnal knowledge; poverty demolishes cupidity, avarice, and earthly cares; humility overthrows pride with the men and affairs of this world; and obedience subjects all things of bodily sense and will to a world-wide apostolate.⁴²

Self-disparagement and the annihilation of the proprietary spirit were, indeed, long steps toward that poverty with which humility was such close kin. Francis wanted the very designation of the brethren as Minors to remind them that they were students in Christ's school of humility; washers of each other's feet; servants but never masters in the ranks of humanity; great only in that they were earth's least.⁴³

Francis divined that it was infinitely easier to surrender property and to crucify the flesh than it was to conquer the spirit. He felt most complimented when others remarked upon his humble status, and dared him to be as good as he seemed.⁴⁴ He doubtless knew moments of defeat when joy in his very humility threatened to end in near affectation and display. The legends suggest that his refusal to be outdone in poverty may have supported at times the very ego which he willed to reduce; that his tendency to dramatize his own faults and their punishment may have mutilated the poor spirit. Self-complacency was probably not always rebuked. Flattery must have leveled his defenses, also, upon occasion.

⁴² See the critical edition of the *Laudes de Virtutibus* in Boehmer, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65. Cf. *Writings*, pp. 85-86. See Francis' purported apostrophe to the Virtues in M. Carmichael (tr.), *The Lady Poverty* (London, 1901), I, 3-8. This is a translation of that highly poetic, and probably rather late, source, the *Sacrum commercium Beati Francisci cum Domina Paupertate*, ed. Alençon (Rome, 1900).

⁴³ I Reg., 4-7; II Reg., Introd.; I Cel., 38; Spec. Perf., XXVI; Bon., VI, 5.

⁴⁴ See the relation of his humility to poverty in II Cel., 140-142; I Reg., 9, 17; Spec. Perf., LXXIII.

Opinionated thought was hardly exorcised by a single resolve. Yet he was aware of all such challenges to the way of true poverty; the very extremes which he employed in self-derogation witness to a continuing struggle for self-mastery.⁴⁵

Furthermore, Francis yearned after the profound simplicity and single-mindedness of Jesus. Never a master of syllogisms, Francis possessed a remarkable intuition of satisfying realities. It was enough for him to know that the less of things and of self he had the more he owned of God, who possessed him.⁴⁶ Real simplicity of soul demanded the renunciation of intellectual arrogance, but it gave in return the single-minded commitment of a purposive will. It called for the surrender of proud sophistication and empty words, but it enriched one with the convictions of truth and the cumulative power of unselfish deeds. Francis may never have ascended all the steps in the way of "holy poverty and blessed simplicity," but he did strive earnestly to practice his own teachings of spiritual purity and intellectual candor. Such training in simplicity conduced ultimately to an experience poor in all the panoplied acquisitions of the world, but rich in the endowments of wisdom.⁴⁷ He knew that such simplicity of life would abolish all duality of learned and ignorant, small and great, while it led to the abounding mutuality of voluntary renunciation.⁴⁸

Obedience, of course, had to be employed toward the full surrender of all but Christ and God. He who made his will his own courted disaster as surely as did Adam in his ancient disobedience. Christ had said that none could have discipleship with him without complete dispossession of things and self. But such redeeming poverty was conditioned upon absolute obedience. Francis insisted that "He abandons all that

⁴⁵ On such tendencies and his attempts to overcome them, see II Cel., 132-134, 55, 83; I Cel., 76; Bon., VII, 6; Spec. Perf., LXI.

⁴⁶ I Reg., 16, 23.

⁴⁷ I Cel., 26, 46, 83; II Cel., 189. ⁴⁸ II Cel., 191-192.

he possesses, loses his body and his soul, who entirely gives himself up to obedience in the hands of his superior."⁴⁹ Unquestioning obedience was the way to uncompromising poverty which was, in turn, the key to the Christian apostolate. His analogy of the dead body as the symbol of that obedience may not have been a pleasant reminder. It did give an unqualified approval to that surrendered spirit which, no more than the corpse, could complain wherever it was placed, look up however high it was raised aloft, or take on the flush of pride however much it was deferred to. In a living spirit possessed of such obedience, poverty could surely effect a perfect work.⁵⁰

Thus, after eleven centuries of mingled acceptance and rejection, by Christians, of Jesus' life of renunciation, a simple-hearted man made that life uniquely his own. In so doing he undertook a sacrificial mission to the people about him and won an unforgettable place in the history and affections of the whole world.

⁴⁹ On obedience in relation to poverty see *Laudes de Virtutibus*; Verb. Admon., 2-3; I Reg., 1, 5; II Reg., 1.

⁵⁰ Bon., VI, 4; Spec. Perf., XLVIII; II Reg., 10.

CHAPTER II

POVERTY IDEALS AND LIFE ACTUALITIES

THE FOLLOWERS OF poverty were confronted immediately with pressing life issues. One of these involved the place of knowledge in an association of renunciants. Francis did not regard learning as an evil in itself. He did believe that it constituted a dangerous temptation to abandon that simplicity and detachment from worldly interests which poverty demanded. With so many men aspiring to knowledge, one who made himself barren for the love of God would surely be blessed. Learning, which Francis humbly appreciated in its proper sphere, was to have no prominent place in his order. If introduced, it would cause friction between learned and simple brethren; books and equipment incompatible with true poverty would then be required; permanent houses and a stability fatal to the Friars' liberty would be necessitated.¹

Mystic that he was, Francis believed as thoroughly in the subordination of intellect to spirit as he did in the sovereignty of the Divine over the personal will. To put one's faith in the intellect was to depend on something less than God and to

¹ Francis' suspicion of all but the most elemental knowledge in his order is reflected in Test., 4; I Reg., 3; II Reg., 10; and Verb. Admon., 5. Cf. II Cel., 62, 195; Bon., VII, 2; Spec. Perf., IV, 13. Good treatments of his position are found in E. Gilson, *La philosophie de Saint Bonaventure* (Paris, 1924), pp. 46-50; in P. Gratien, *Histoire*, pp. 84-96; and in A. G. Little, "The First Hundred Years of the Franciscan School at Oxford," in W. W. Seton (ed.), *St. Francis of Assisi: Essays in Commemoration* (London, 1926), p. 165. Gilson and Gratien repudiate H. Felder's thesis that Francis gave positive encouragement to the growth of learning in his order. He put this forward in his otherwise authoritative *Geschichte der wissenschaftlichen Studien im Franziskanerorden bis um die Mitte des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Freiburg i/B, 1904).

This chapter incorporates in revised form materials from a Ph.D. dissertation: R. C. Petry, *The Ideal of Poverty in Francis of Assisi* (Private edition distributed by the University of Chicago Libraries, Chicago, 1934).

defeat thereby the perfect surrender to Him which poverty involved. Here was a poor man who had renounced proprietorship of every kind, including that type of selfish appropriation which learning involved. He labored to forestall that pride in intellectual achievement which is more devastating, as it is more subtle, than the pride in other possessions.

Francis is reported as saying that one who would attain to real poverty "must needs in all ways renounce, not alone the wisdom of the world, but even knowledge of letters, so that, dispossessed of such an inheritance, he may go in the strength of the Lord, and give himself up naked into the arms of the Crucified. For in vain doth he utterly renounce the world who keepeth in the secret places of his heart a shrine for his own senses."² "Learning," he asserted, "makes many men indocile, not suffering a certain stiffness of theirs to be bent by the discipline of humility."³ Francis was constant in his insistence that poverty be wider and deeper than the renunciation of material things. For him, poverty was the queen of a completely dispossessed spirit—a spirit which was insensible to all things which detracted from union with the Divine. He put virtuous labors before books and science, because he preferred the edification of charity to the self-inflation which goes with knowledge. He is purported to have said: "As much knowledge hath a man as he doth work, and a Religious is as good a speaker as his works proclaim, for the worker is known by his fruit."⁴

Francis lauded simplicity in opposition to an inordinate desire for knowledge.⁵ His fears that those led by the desire of learning would find their hands empty in the day of trib-

² Bon., VII, 2. Cf. II Cel., 194: "Dixit aliquando magnum clericum etiam scientiae quodammodo resignare debere, cum veniret ad Ordinem, ut tali expropriatus possessione, nudum se offerret brachiis Crucifixi."

³ II Cel., 194.

⁴ Spec. Perf., IV.

⁵ According to legend, he recommended in the same breath that he exhorted to poverty, ". . . simplicitatem, contra inordinatum appetitum scientiae . . ." (Actus, LXII, 7).

ulation are graphically depicted. In that day books would avail nothing. He was not, hereby, manifesting displeasure with Scripture reading. He was merely trying to dissuade his followers from devoting undue attention to learning. He anticipated a time shortly to come when the knowledge "that puffeth up" would be an occasion of ruin.⁶ It grieved him to see his company repudiate its primitive vow of gospel simplicity in order to pursue a more sophisticated policy in conformity with monastic traditions. He was persuaded that the Lord had never intended him or his followers to walk by the way of science or eloquence.⁷

This simple man perceived that even such a worthy form of self-expression as preaching might offer temptation to depart from simplicity and poverty. He besought preachers, clerks, and all others speaking publicly to be diligent in humiliating themselves in everything. They were not to boast or flatter themselves, nor were they to be puffed up inwardly at their eloquent speech or fine works. He felt that involved, sophisticated reasoning and florid rhetoric were incompatible with the external profession of poverty. He warned against wordly wisdom and the prudence of the flesh. Evangelical poverty involved the renunciation of those mental appropriations whose possession led to competitive ambitions and the exaggerated appreciation of self.⁸

Francis' own preaching was spontaneous and free, although heavily freighted with gospel messages. It was recalled that his teaching showed the wisdom of the world to be foolish "and turned it in a short time, under the guidance of Christ, by the foolishness of preaching to the true wisdom of God."⁹

⁶ And the source reads: "Volebat enim ipsos potius esse caritate bonos quam scientiae curiositate sciolos." Cf. *Spec. Perf.*, LXIX, 5-6.

⁷ *Spec. Perf.*, LXVIII, LXXI, 4-9. With due allowance for the possible bias against learning inserted in this source by later redactors of Franciscan writings, one may still sense in it something of Francis' yearning for the simple, unaffected life.

⁸ I Reg., 17.

⁹ I Cel., 72, 89.

Legendary accounts eulogized him as one who spoke not in the plausible words of human wisdom, but according to the truth and power of the Holy Spirit. His words seem to have been largely devoid of flattery and blandishments.¹⁰ He tried to follow his own advice that the preacher "must rather grow hot within than utter cold words outwardly."¹¹

Francis was far from being an ignorant man, though he was not formally trained in any real sense. He had a passionate love for the words of the Lord and exhibited a profound insight into the truths of Scripture, frequently surpassing the more pretentious interpretations of less humble men.¹² For all theologians and those dispensing most holy divine words, Francis himself felt, and exhorted others to feel, a special affection. He desired that they be accorded special honor and veneration as communicators of spirit and life.¹³ He had little patience, however, with men "who only wish[ed] to know the text in order to appear wiser than others." He saw men sacrificing themselves to literalism through their desire to know verbally, and to interpret to others, the holy books whose spirit they refused to follow. On the contrary, those would be vivified by the spirit of the Scriptures who would abandon textual literalism for an interpretation of word and example in accord with divine intention.¹⁴

Francis seems to have admitted that there might be a rightful place in the Order for a few books adapted to the requirements of needy brethren. If permitted, such books must give strong testimony for God; they must be edifying rather than beautiful.¹⁵ Clerks were to possess only such books as were necessary to perform their office.¹⁶ Francis did not wish

¹⁰ Tres Soc., 54; Bon., XII, 1-7.

¹¹ II Cel., 163.

¹² Bon., XI, 1-2; Spec. Perf., LIII.

¹³ Test., 3; II Cel., 163.

¹⁴ Verb. Admon., 7.

¹⁵ II Cel., 62; Spec. Perf., V; MS-Little, 84. The reference is to *Un nouveau manuscrit franciscain Ancien Phillipps*, 12290, Fascicule XVIII, *Opuscles de critique historique*, ed. A. G. Little (Paris, 1914-19).

¹⁶ I Reg., 3.

the minister-general to "be a collector of books nor much intent on reading, lest he be taking from his office what he [was] spending by anticipation on study."¹⁷ He would gladly have substituted for the Friars' desire of knowledge and books a desire for humility, simplicity, prayer, and poverty. All too many of his brethren were developing a propensity for learning most prejudicial to their vocation of humility and prayer.¹⁸

Bonaventura reports Francis' reply to those who inquired whether or not he willed that the clerks already received into the Order should devote themselves to the study of Holy Scripture. He declared that such was his will only so long as they followed the example of Christ, who prayed more than he read, and so long as they did not lose their zeal for prayer, nor study only in order that they might know how they ought to speak. He preferred, rather, that they should study that they might point out to others what they should do. He was desirous that his brethren should be learners of the Gospel and thus make progress in the knowledge of the truth; that they should grow in the purity of artlessness in order that they might not dissociate the simplicity of the dove from the wisdom of the serpent, which two the most excellent Teacher had conjoined with His blessed mouth.¹⁹

Learning, therefore, did not enter fundamentally into Francis' program for the realization of poverty. He did permit clerks to study sacred lore to the exclusion of the profane sciences on the condition that such study should be a means of sanctification.²⁰

Francis took care that inner poverty, which was basic in a life conformable to the poor Christ, should be reflected in the absolute renunciation of all outer proprietorship. He desired as much abstention as possible from even the use of

¹⁷ II Cel., 185; for further reactions to books, see Spec. Perf., III-V.

¹⁸ Spec. Perf., LXXII, 1-3, 9. ¹⁹ Bon., XI, 1.

²⁰ Gratien, *Histoire*, p. 96; II Cel., 62, 194, 195.

things. Poverty of self and poverty of external possessions were mutually indispensable. Francis took seriously the Lord's counsel, "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come follow Me." Family, lands, and one's own life had, if necessary, to be given up by the followers of the Lord for his sake.²¹

In the Second Rule, as in the First, poverty was given an exalted place. Its followers were saluted as heirs and kings of the kingdom of heaven, poor in goods but exalted in virtue. The brethren of Francis heard the plea, "Let poverty be your heritage and lead you to the land of the living. Attach yourselves to her entirely, much loved brethren, and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ never desire to possess anything under heaven."²²

Though always considerate of the salvation of others, Francis longed, above all things, to be dissolved and to be with Christ. He studied sedulously to be free of all worldly things, made himself insensible to outward affairs, and kept natural impulses in check. He occupied himself with God alone. "Wholly emptied of himself he rested long in the Saviour's wounds."²³ Such, at least, was the contention of his biographer.

Francis believed that Satan, in his assault upon the human heart, attempted to "blind it by the cares and business of the world, and to make his dwelling there. . . ."²⁴ Greed in men, as in animals, was an evil of portentous significance.²⁵ Friar Giles illustrated the Poverello's attitude when he depreciated man's ceaseless striving for more possessions. He found men burrowing like moles amid lesser goods, ignorant or oblivious of real treasures elsewhere. He declared further that Francis was more pleased with the birds, who made no provision for

²¹ I Reg., 1.

²² II Reg., 6.

²⁴ I Reg., 22.

²³ I Cel., 71.

²⁵ II Cel., 47.

the future, than with the ants, who were ever gathering and storing provender.²⁶ After all, Francis regarded God as the only true possessor. A life of poverty most truly expressed proper appreciation for, and confident trust in, the common benefactor and provider of all. Blessed was the servant who attributed all his goods to the Lord his God, and hid not his Master's money by retaining something for himself.²⁷

St. Francis himself eschewed property in order that he might the more fully possess everything in the Lord.²⁸ Having once renounced self and the world, he and his brethren needed but to be solicitous to follow the desire and will of God.²⁹ Upon one occasion he was importuned by the ministers to allow something to the brotherhood in common, at least. He received assurance through prayer, however, that the Lord would provide things general and special for his family, whatever the increase, so long as it should hope in Him.³⁰ He feared that concessions to necessity would be followed by surrender to pleasure.³¹

Celano tells us that "The Saint taught those coming to the Order previously to give a bill of divorcement to the world, by first offering outwardly their goods, and then inwardly themselves to God. He admitted to the Order none but those who had expropriated themselves and were keeping back nothing at all; both because of the word of the Holy Gospel and lest they should cause scandal by retaining a treasure-chest."³² According to Francis' early intention, the postulant for admission to the Order was to be carefully warned as to the type of life expected of him. Having been

²⁶ *The Little Flowers*, p. 166.

²⁷ Verb. Admon., 19.

²⁸ I Cel., 44: "Nihil volebat proprietatis habere, ut omnia posset in Domino plenius possidere."

²⁹ I Reg., 22; Bon., II, 5; Tres Soc., 21.

³⁰ Spec. Perf., XIII; for the Savior's prohibition of property, individually or in common, see MS-Little, 87.

³¹ I Cel., 51: "Impossibile namque fore aiebat satisfacere necessitati et voluptati non obedire."

³² II Cel., 80.

thus informed, he was to sell all his goods and distribute them to the poor.³³ Francis promptly discerned the motive of the man who, upon entering the Order, gave up his property to relatives and reserved nothing for the poor. "Go thy way, brother fly," said Francis.³⁴ When a man presented himself for admission, the Friars were to be careful not to become involved in his temporal affairs, but were to present him to their minister as soon as possible.³⁵

The life of the early brethren was one of direst poverty in all things. At one time Francis and his brethren returned to a deserted hut near Assisi, "wherein, after the pattern of Holy Poverty, they lived in much toil and necessity, seeking to be refreshed rather with the bread of tears than of luxury."³⁶ At a forsaken place near Orte, the brethren exulted greatly "at seeing and having nothing which might give them vain or carnal delight." Comforted by the lack of all worldly things, and finding delight in God alone, they vowed undying allegiance to poverty. Fearful, however, lest a protracted stay might entangle them in even the semblance of ownership, they removed thence.³⁷

Francis was insistent that the Friars be on guard wherever they were, in hermitage or elsewhere, against appropriating any dwelling or driving each other out. Whatever their surroundings and circumstances, they were to respect and honor one another without murmuring.³⁸ In their disdain of all things earthly, they maintained for each other a common affection rather than private love. Each made of himself a living sacrifice to his brother's need.³⁹

³³ I Reg., 2. If someone came who could not give away his goods without difficulty, but had the spiritual will to relinquish them, it was sufficient. Cf. II Reg., 2.

³⁴ II Cel., 81. Francis used this term to designate those who shared the benefits but not the obligations of the brethren. Some, like the fly, were always ready to eat but never willing to work. Cf. II Cel., 75; Spec. Perf., XXIV; Bon., VII, 10.

³⁶ Bon., IV, 3.

³⁸ I Reg., 7.

³⁵ I Reg., 2.

³⁷ I Cel., 35.

³⁹ I Cel., 39.

In the early days when the Friars were little known, some were suspected of being thieves and were frequently denied lodgings. Some found shelter in the porches of churches or of houses.⁴⁰ At Rivo Torto "these most strenuous despisers of large and beautiful houses" found protection from storms or rain in an empty hovel. Their father in Christ declared that "one ascends to Heaven quicker from a hovel than from a palace." They endured without complaint their quarters, which were so cramped that they could scarcely sit down. Francis wrote their names on the beams so that, desiring to rest or pray, each might know his own place. Here they remained for a time under the vigilant eye and rigid discipline of their mentor in poverty. They renounced everything, worked hard, and frequently contented themselves with a fare of turnips begged from people round about. Disturbed by the actions of a country dweller who thought they were about to establish ownership of their wretched quarters, Francis withdrew with his brethren to the Portiuncula, where stood the Church of St. Mary, formerly repaired by him.⁴¹

Before he would allow the brethren to live in any house, no matter how small, Francis had to have assurance that there was some owner to whom the property belonged, "for he always aimed at his sons' observing the laws of the pilgrims—namely, to be gathered under another's roof, to pass onward peaceably, and to thirst after their native land." As transients and exiles, they had always to remember that nothing temporal merited their abiding attachment.⁴² As pilgrims and strangers traversing the wilderness of this world, the brethren were instructed that they might, like Israelites indeed, "celebrate continually, as those poor in spirit, the Lord's Passover, to wit, His departure from the world unto the Father."⁴³ To the last, the Poverello prohibited the Friars'

⁴⁰ Tres Soc., 38.

⁴¹ I Cel., 42-44; Tres Soc., 55.

⁴² II Cel., 59; Bon., VII, 2; Tres Soc., 45, 59.

⁴³ Bon., VII, 9.

receiving churches, poor dwellings, or any other places built for them, unless they were conformable to the holy poverty prescribed in the Rule. Theirs were the obligations of pilgrimage. To them they must be true.⁴⁴

When a brother inadvertently referred to a certain cell as that of Francis, the aroused leader refused to stay in it longer. The friar's unwitting statement was sufficient evidence for Francis that there was still in his group a latent sense of proprietorship, the malignant potentialities of which he must expose without further delay. He remembered that Christ had no cell in the wilderness. He was determined that his brethren, like himself, should have nothing either in the way of property, though of course they could not live without the use of houses.⁴⁵

Francis prescribed dwellings in keeping with the gospel ideal. He specified poor habitations of wood or wattle and daub, not stone. They were to be small and unpretentious throughout. Even such humble quarters surpassed the accommodations of the impoverished Christ, who had nowhere to lay his head.⁴⁶ Displeased by the building of a great house constructed for the Friars in his absence, the Saint began to tear it down. He was dissuaded from his purpose only when he learned that the ownership pertained to the commune of Assisi.⁴⁷ Bonaventura declares that when Francis found dwellings opposed to gospel poverty by reason of ownership or magnificence, he ordered them demolished or the Friars removed from them. Evangelical poverty was the foundation upon which his whole Order rested; while poverty endured, the Religion would stand firm; when poverty was overthrown, the Religion would fall with it.⁴⁸ Francis blamed

⁴⁴ Test., 7.

⁴⁵ II Cel., 59; Spec. Perf., IX; Bon., VII; Leg. ant., 50. The last work referred to is *La Legenda Antiqua S. Francisci . . . Pérouse*, ed. F. M. Delorme, in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* (hereinafter cited as AFH), XV (1922), 23-70, 278-332.

⁴⁷ Spec. Perf., VII.

⁴⁶ II Cel., 56; Spec. Perf., IX-X.
⁴⁸ Bon., VII, 2.

the vicar for having built a house in which the brethren might say the Hours. He would not have this place, which was to be the form and example of the whole Order, to be other than a good example of poverty.⁴⁹ He was unwilling "that the friars possess any places by right of ownership, in the houses, or churches, or gardens, or other things which they used, but should sojourn therein as travellers and pilgrims." He feared the danger to poverty of friars gathered in great numbers in their dwellings.⁵⁰ To observe poverty in a great multitude was most difficult, and poverty in all things was his intention from beginning to end.⁵¹ He desired that the brethren build little churches and lodgings, rather than great ones, in keeping with exemplary poverty and humility.⁵²

Francis did not merely attack proprietorship and the enjoyment of fine quarters by the community. He even refused to accept for long the hospitality and luxurious accommodations accorded him as the guest of a cardinal. As a pattern for poor brethren he felt it incumbent upon him to shun palaces and "walk humbly among the humble in humble abodes." Thus he would invigorate those who bore poverty by himself bearing the same.⁵³

Not only did Francis interdict fine houses, but he also abhorred select furniture. He wanted "nothing in tables or vessels which might remind him of the world; to the end that everything might sing of pilgrimage and exile." Everything suggestive of stability and attractiveness in furnishings symbolized satisfaction with material things; it diffused the subtle magnetism of ingratiating ease. The seductive appeal of comfortable quarters lured the soul from spiritual adventure and led to its final acceptance of the *status quo*. Yet

⁴⁹ Spec. Perf., VIII.

⁵⁰ Spec. Perf., X.

⁵¹ Spec. Perf., X, 8: "Et haec fuit intentio ejus ab initio suae conversionis usque ad finem ut paupertas in omnibus penitus servaretur."

⁵² See Spec. Perf., IX-X, for further details as to Francis' ideas on appropriate buildings and their construction.

⁵³ Bon., VI, 10.

so great was the poverty of the early brethren in beds and couches that those who had a few torn rags over some straw deemed it a marriage bed.⁵⁴

In clothing, likewise, Francis gave the example of rigid poverty. He was rich in a tunic, cord, and drawers only, being "warmed inwardly by the divine fire rather than outwardly by bodily covering." Extra garments and soft raiment were most reprehensible except in cases of real necessity.⁵⁵ Postulants for admission and full-fledged members had carefully specified clothing which was uniformly poor and subject to repeated patching.⁵⁶

Francis proscribed the possession of animals and the riding of horses except in cases of infirmity and other great necessity. No such manifestations of ease and power were to be countenanced.⁵⁷ He found in property the great obstacle to the higher possession of human fraternity, peace, and love of God. The goods of earth he regarded as a loan by the divine proprietor for man's use in common. To put in a claim of private ownership was to seek a monopoly of God's bounty and to usurp the right of administering resources which God alone could distribute in equity. To assert exclusive claim to anything was to rob him who in need had at least an equal right to it. Francis insisted that things provided for himself, even though they were life necessities, should be given up to poor folk whom he met, not only as largesse, but even as things rightfully belonging to them. To keep a cloak when another needed it more was theft. Coming across a poor man, Francis gave him his own mantle as if he were but returning it to its proper owner. "For," he said, "we received it only as a loan, until we should come upon one poorer than ourselves."⁵⁸

The only things which Francis regarded as really worth

⁵⁴ II Cel., 60, 63.

⁵⁵ II Cel., 55, 69.

⁵⁶ I Reg., 2.

⁵⁷ I Reg., 15; II Reg., 3.

⁵⁸ Bon., VIII, 5; Spec. Perf., XXX, XXXIII.

having were those which the heart alone could possess, which money could not buy, and which private possession could not encompass. Such were the purified affections of poor men, the heady intoxication of natural beauty, and the consuming ecstasy of divine love. Things of but fleeting moment, such as temporal wealth and material power, were subject always to the cupidity and avarice of others. To possess such property was to be always ready for the defense of one's rights by armed force or legal process, both of which rendered the love of God and neighbor a sorry fiction. Poverty alone could defeat cupidity and avarice.⁵⁹ How great was the torture of a rich man who, having prostituted all honor and justice to the acquisition of gain, had to leave his accumulations behind him at death to those who cursed him for not leaving more!⁶⁰

Francis could not reconcile love with the prosecution of selfish rights. He was convinced that, for him at least, charity and property-holding were incompatible. He believed in the ultimate antagonism of selfish proprietorship and the perfection of life after the gospel pattern. He probably sensed how cursed was his age with the gainful spirit. He did all he could, by example and teaching, to liberate men from the bondage of false values and to allay their feverish thirst for material possession.

Francis, however, never attacked private ownership as it existed within society at large, nor did he assault the social institutions which rested upon it. He respected social conventions with regard to the rights of ownership in so far as these rights pertained to men outside his own fraternity. He encouraged his friars to gather the bounty and to live in the humble dwellings regulated by the conventional proprietor-

⁵⁹ Verb. Admon., 27; Tres Soc., Cap. IX.

⁶⁰ Epist. ad fideles, 12. This abbreviation refers to Francis' *Opusculum commonitorium et exhortatorum* (*epistola quam misit omnibus fidelibus*), Boehmer, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-56.

ship of others. He did not thereby concede the ultimate validity of all the economic pretensions of society. On the other hand, he did not set himself up as a judge and comprehensive reformer of the existing social system. He regarded rich and poor as brothers, created alike by a common father. He esteemed the rich and great as the lords and masters of himself and of his brethren. They aided the Friars in their program of penitence and renunciation by contributing to them in their necessity. The brethren were not to scorn those living delicately, for God was able to justify them.⁶¹

For himself and his friars, who attempted to scale the heights of perfection, total poverty was demanded; he made no such demand of the Third Order, or of the world at large. A social rebel and a systematic reformer of social institutions he never was. He did strive to develop in all hearts a truer appreciation of the inner riches of poverty in Christ.⁶²

Francis, who despised all worldly things, execrated money above everything else. Perhaps he saw in it the symbol of those grasping propensities and unprincipled transactions so pervasive alike of human personality and divine standards. He warned his followers to fly from money as from the Devil himself; they were to regard it as they would excrement. A brother who so much as touched some money was forced to remove it with his mouth and to put it on the dung heap outside.⁶³

Perhaps Francis, with his flair for the symbolic, did not overemphasize the psychological significance of that which

⁶¹ Tres Soc., 58, 45.

⁶² It is Sabatier's conviction that "St. Francis no more condemned the family or property than Jesus did; he simply saw in them ties from which the apostle, and the apostle alone, needs to be free" (*Life*, p. 266); Salvatorelli, *op. cit.*, pp. 123, 139; L. L. Dubois, *St. Francis of Assisi: Social Reformer* (Washington, D. C., 1904), p. 185.

⁶³ II Cel., 65; see also II Cel., 68; Bon. VII, 5; Spec. Perf., XIV; MS-Little, 88, *et passim*, for dire results accompanying contacts of the Friars with money.

was destined to become, for so many men, the *sine qua non* of human exertion and a leading factor in the tragic confusion of values. It is quite likely that money connoted for him that cumulative power wielded by men, untouched by human suffering, who profited without labor from the desperate toil of those whom they victimized. His anathema of money and of the evils to which it gave rise was in striking contrast to the current solicitude for gain and the growing organization of machinery for procuring it. He was probably unaware of the deep-lying historical processes which rested behind and within the transformation in trade, commerce, and general economic activity. He propagated an ideal which sought to restore man and his welfare to the center of human attention, from which the growing craze for economic profit was thrusting them.

Francis could hardly have been ignorant of the havoc which capitalistic ambitions had wrought in current monastic orders. Whether or not he attacked directly the current institutions for procuring and dispensing money, his whole emphasis was a criticism upon the essential futility of the acquisitive spirit. He could not bear to see men become mere instruments for the facilitation of material profit.⁶⁴

Whatever his convictions upon the defects of social institutions, St. Francis opposed money as he did other property, because it was a great obstacle in the way of imitating Christ. The Savior had warned against malice, avarice, the solitudes of this world, and the cares of this life. Therefore Francis placed a flat prohibition upon any friar's taking, receiving, or even causing to be received, any coin or money, whether for the purchase of books or clothes, or as payment for work,

⁶⁴ For discussions of Francis and the economic system of his day see Glaser, *op. cit.*, p. 55; K. Schmitz, *Der Zustand der süddeutschen Franziskaner-Konventualen am Ausgang des Mittelalters* (Düsseldorf, 1915), pp. 63-64; Coulton, *Five Centuries*, II, 2; G. Schnürer, *Kirche und Kultur im Mittelalter* (Paderborn, 1924), II, 347.

on any occasion whatever, except in the case of absolute necessity for sick brothers.

Money was to be valued no more highly than dust or stones. Francis advised greatest care lest they who had left everything lose the kingdom of heaven for so small a thing. Should a friar pick up and appropriate money as coin, except in the case of the above-named necessity of the sick, the brethren were to ostracize him as a thief and a false brother until he did penance.

Friars were not to seek or cause others to seek alms or money for a house or a place, nor were they to accompany persons begging in this way. Friars might beg alms for lepers in case of absolute necessity. But money was ever to be a cause of great fear; all friars were to avoid searching the world for any filthy gain.⁶⁵ For work done the brethren might receive things needful. They might, like other poor, receive bodily necessities, but no money.⁶⁶ Francis reiterated his statement that friars and ministers were never to receive currency for themselves or for others.

The office of minister-general was to be filled by an incumbent who would "execrate money, the chief cause of corruption" in the profession of the followers of poverty. A man thus placed at the head of a poor order could not well afford to make wrong use of treasure chests. A little book, a box of pens, and a seal were to suffice for him, even as the brethren were to be content with a box of pens and a seal.⁶⁷

Francis' devotion to poverty necessitated a life of labor with the studied improvement of every moment of time. He thought it a grave fault "not to be doing some good thing, and judged that not to be always going forward was to be going back."⁶⁸ The Saint's industrious habits left him little sympathy for the idle. He declared that the lukewarm

⁶⁵ I Reg., 8; Tres Soc., 35, 45.

⁶⁷ II Cel., 185.

⁶⁶ I Reg., 7, 2; II Reg., 4.

⁶⁸ II Cel., 159.

who neglected to apply themselves earnestly to some occupation would "soon be spewed out of the mouth of God." Francis himself worked with his hands, while he carefully hoarded the precious time. It was his desire that all the brethren be employed. They were to learn crafts, if they knew none already. He wished this in order that the fraternity might be less burdensome to men, and that their hearts and tongues might not be captured by the evils of idleness. The gain or hire of labor was not to be subject to the determination of the laborer, but to that of the warden or community.⁶⁹ The brethren who knew how to work were to practice their former trades, if this could be done with convenience and without endangering their souls. Francis referred to the prophetic injunction to eat of the labor of the hands and cited the apostolic decree: "If any man will not work neither let him eat." Of course the Friars were to have the needed tools for their labors.

Francis seized every opportunity to safeguard his sons against the idleness which the Devil found conducive to his purposes. He desired that constant employment at some occupation profitable for the soul, together with prayer at all seasons, should find a vital place in the Franciscan schedule of spiritual development.⁷⁰ The Poverello's last will and testament emphasized the need of labor which he continued by example to commend to all men. All the brethren were to labor at some work in keeping with honesty. Those not knowing how were to learn, not in order to receive payment for their work, but to set a good example and to banish idleness. The brethren were to receive a recompense of needed things, but no money, for their work. When they failed to receive payment for their toil, they were to have access to the table of the Lord by begging alms from door to door.⁷¹

The evidence is indubitable that Francis intended his

⁶⁹ II Cel., 160-161; I Cel., 39; Spec. Perf., LXXV.

⁷⁰ I Reg., 7; Spec. Perf., XXIV. ⁷¹ Test., 5; I Reg., 7.

brethren to earn their livelihood by their own labor; they were to depend on alms in case of necessity.⁷² Mendicancy filled a legitimate place in the life of Francis' poor, humble men. It was indispensable as a means to self-conquest and the perfect imitation of Christ's poverty. It was sometimes a most welcome resource when the dues of labor were not forthcoming. However, the extreme lengths to which mendicancy was pushed in later Franciscan history were wholly out of keeping with the founder's wishes. Nothing was farther from his mind than the imposition of a heavy burden upon people, many of whom eked out a precarious existence.⁷³ On the economic side Francis was a worker much more than a mendicant. Sabatier declares that "he never dreamed of creating a mendicant order, he created a laboring order." To work was the rule; to beg was the exception, though the latter was by no means dishonorable.⁷⁴ Getting their bread by labor when they could, the early brethren were not ashamed, when hungry and without other means, to beg for it as the wages of spiritual service.

Francis called upon his friars to follow the humility and poverty of Christ while they rejoiced in their fellowship with the poor and weak, with lepers and wayside beggars. When it was necessary, therefore, the brethren were to go for alms.⁷⁵ This they were to do without shame, inasmuch as Christ, the ever-blessed Virgin, and his Disciples lived on alms. Shame suffered by the Friars from those refusing them alms would but lead to greater honor at the tribunal

⁷² The Rule of 1221, after authorizing the brethren to receive things needful but no money for their work, continues: "Et, cum necesse fuerit, vadant pro elemosina sicut alii pauperes" (I Reg., 7). Cf. I Reg., 9.

⁷³ Spec. Perf., XII, LXXV; II Cel., 160-161; Dubois, *op. cit.*, pp. 182-183.

⁷⁴ Sabatier, *Life*, p. 121; Sabatier, *Franciscan Essays* ("British Society of Franciscan Studies," Extra Series II, Aberdeen, 1912), p. 6; Coulton, *Christ, St. Francis and Today*, p. 81; for marked emphasis upon mendicancy see Cuthbert, "St. Francis and Poverty," *Franciscan Essays*, I, 25-30.

⁷⁵ I Reg., 9: "Et cum necesse fuerit, vadant pro elemosinis." Cf. II Reg., 6.

of the Lord Jesus Christ. The brethren were taught to see in alms a heritage and right due the poor and gained to them by the Christ. Alms were not a shameful infringement of others' prerogatives, but the natural right of the children of Providence in God.

The Friars in begging alms were granting their benefactors the opportunity to experience the joy and blessedness which attend giving.⁷⁶ Francis declared that the Lesser Brethren had been lent to the world at this latest hour to enable the elect to fulfill in them that which would elicit from the Judge the commendation: "That which ye have done to one of My Lesser Brethren ye have done to Me."⁷⁷

Francis made mendicancy a secondary, though upon occasion a legitimate, means for the procuring of livelihood. The primary end of mendicancy, so far as he was concerned, seems to have been the development of proper humility and the imitation of Christ without shame in his life of poverty. Francis "made use of alms gathered from door to door much more willingly than of such as had been offered. He declared that to be ashamed of begging was hostile to salvation, but affirmed that that shame in begging which does not draw back the foot was holy."⁷⁸ He was not satisfied that the Friars should merely accept alms offered without solicitation. House-to-house begging alone could bring conquest of self and the following of Christ unashamed.

Only gradually had Francis conquered his shame at begging; but when he had done so, he found the bread begged for the love of God to be veritable angels' food. Meanwhile, all his former loathing changed to a sense of sweetness. Despising worldly repute, he prepared to mount gradually the steps to gospel perfection.⁷⁹

For some time Francis disciplined himself and spared his brethren by seeking alms alone. But, weakened in body and

⁷⁶ I Reg., 9; II Reg., 6.

⁷⁷ II Cel., 71; Bon., VII, 8.

⁷⁸ II Cel., 71.

⁷⁹ Tres Soc., 10, 22, 24; Bon., I, 6; VII, 8; II Cel., 13, 14.

apprehensive of their distaste for begging, he finally called them to their high duty and privilege. He reminded them that the Son of God, who for their sakes made himself poor in the world, was nobler than they. For his sake they had chosen the way of poverty and ought not be ashamed to seek alms. It was hardly fitting for the heirs of the kingdom to blush for the earnest of their heavenly inheritance. Shame was becoming, rather, to those who retained something without having final right to it. Through poverty the brethren entered into the heritage of the sole proprietor of all. This privilege of begging, which was now theirs, would one day be avidly sought by many noble and wise men yet to join the company.⁸⁰

It was Francis' custom when dining with a great lord to seek first for scraps of bread among neighboring houses, which remnants of food he then brought with him to the table. When questioned as to his unusual conduct, "he answered that he would not relinquish an enduring inheritance for a fief granted for an hour. 'It is poverty,' said he, 'that appoints the heirs and kings of the kingdom of heaven and not your false riches.'"⁸¹

When the Bishop of Ostia, who later became Pope Gregory IX, remonstrated with Francis for putting him to shame in his own house by first collecting alms and then distributing them to the guests assembled at table, Francis replied: "I have rather shown you honor, since I have honored a greater Lord; for God is well pleased with poverty and with that especially which is voluntary begging. For I have a royal dignity and a preeminent nobility to follow that Lord, who, though He was rich, for our sakes became poor." It is recorded that the bishop experienced great edification from this pointed speech.⁸²

At one time Francis had occasion to express appreciation

⁸⁰ II Cel., 74; Spec. Perf., XVIII. ⁸¹ II Cel., 72.

⁸² II Cel., 73; Bon., VII, 7; Spec. Perf., XXIII.

to a brother who joyously celebrated his return with alms. Francis kissed his shoulder and blessed him for his ready departure, his humble search, and his joyous return.⁸³

Francis stressed mendicancy, therefore, as a vital part of the gospel program of poverty. Through it, he and the brethren sought a livelihood when their labors secured for them but inadequate provision. He was never a thief, however, in getting or using alms beyond need. He always took less than he needed out of fear of defrauding other poor folks of their share. To retain that of which another had need was theft.⁸⁴ To ask men for reasonable alms for the love of God was, however, to request but a fair share of that which God alone possessed, and to which the man who asked had equal right with the man who had. By their own labor, Francis and his brethren earned the right to partake of God's common bounty. By their spiritual service and edifying example, they merited such support as their work did not furnish.

⁸³ II Cel., 76.

⁸⁴ Spec. Perf., XII; MS-Little, 86.

CHAPTER III

SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN THE APPLICATION OF POVERTY

FROM BOYHOOD Francis had been acquainted with the activities of a warring, acquisitive society. In his childhood, Assisi, like other Italian communes, was struggling to throw off foreign domination and feudal overlordship. Once having achieved a measure of independence, she assimilated some of the conquered, feudal nobility and settled down to a defense of her commercial ambitions against competing townsmen.¹

Communal development followed generally similar lines in the various cities of Italy. The town nobility and upper bourgeoisie had exploited the services of the whole populace in the struggle against feudal dominance. With independence won, they promptly constituted themselves an oligarchy of wealth and privilege scornful of popular rights. The small bourgeoisie and lower artisans secured alleviation of their wrongs only after repeated and sometimes violent uprisings. The poor, unorganized workers had virtually no share in civic benefits. Such provision as there was for representative assemblies did not include these disfranchised people.²

Francis' times were experiencing an upswing of capitalistic tendencies long in evidence but now facilitated by the crusades. Lending at interest, extended credit facilities, and an expanding money economy were prevalent. Municipal legislation and ecclesiastical protests against usury, unjust prices, and monopolies did less to retard than they did to advertise

¹ See Scudder, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-69.

² Consult H. Pirenne, *Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade* (Princeton, 1925), pp. 177-178; P. Boissonnade, *Le travail dans l'Europe Chrétienne au moyen âge* (Paris, 1921), pp. 236-272; E. Gebhart, "L'Apostolat de Saint François d'Assise," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, LXXVII (1886), 103-106.

the prevailing state of affairs. The church, with all of her protests, participated freely in this economy.³

Everywhere these capitalistic activities, which were predominantly commercial in their earlier phases, lent themselves to a more specialized industrial development. The growing towns welcomed every serf and villein who left the manorial estates to swell the ranks of urban workers. But the towns welcomed them to a new subjection, not a true freedom. The miseries of these disillusioned ones were now added to the sufferings of those already being exploited. What wonder that these *little people*, victimized by high prices, foreign and domestic warfare, and ravaging disease, were endlessly arrayed against the *great people* of wealth and ease!⁴

In Assisi, also, there was this economic and social cleavage between the *Minores* and the *Majores*. Only when rival cities threatened did the town submerge its factional hatreds and unite against the common enemy. When outside struggles ceased, internal disaffection reappeared. And always there were the effort of the rich to keep and augment their wealth, the struggle of the middle classes to lift themselves by trade, and the thwarted lusts of the submerged populace for the material things denied them.

Francis had good opportunity to view this whole picture of communal development, commercial greed, and fratricidal money-madness in his home town and in neighboring cities. In his infancy the Peace of Constance (1183) had celebrated the victory of the communes over the imperial ambitions of Frederick Barbarossa. As a boy he may have helped to efface the last symbols of foreign domination. Perhaps he had a

³ On medieval capitalism and the place of the church in it, see H. Pirenne, G. Cohen, and H. Focillon, *La civilisation occidentale au moyen âge du XI^e au milieu du XV^e siècle*, t. VIII of the *Histoire du Moyen Age*, published in G. Glotz's *Histoire Générale* (Paris, 1933), pp. 139-145, 121-122; Robertson, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-57; Fanfani, *op. cit.*, chaps. vi and vii.

⁴ Salvatorelli, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-103.

hand in leveling the remaining feudal castles, some of whose occupants now added their restless aspirations to the turmoil of the city below. When he entered his bourgeois father's cloth business, he learned the pressing ambitions of trade.⁵ His father and many others sought to impress upon him the near sacredness of money, which might legitimately be spent on a gentleman's pleasures but never squandered on poor churches and despised paupers. Later he was to hate it for the slavery it imposed upon all who so much as desired it. Even the Bishop of Assisi needed his reminder that possessions carry the germ of discord and seal the death of love.⁶ What commercial rivalry led to, Francis had ample time to ponder in a Perugian prison.⁷ Much of his life was devoted to bringing peace among battling knights, struggling urban classes, and embittered victims of the war-ridden countryside.⁸ Both town and country were to hear the message and to feel the sacrificial sympathy of this apostle of poverty.

With all of his devotion to the contemplative life, Francis did not forget his high responsibility for exemplary service to his fellows. Celano observes that although he sought unfrequented spots "the better wholly to direct his mind to God"; yet, "when he saw that the time was favorable, he was not slothful in attending to business and in applying himself gladly to the salvation of his neighbours."⁹ In the midst of spiritual serenity and of the mystical absorption of his soul into the Divine, he heard a call to share the sorrows, as well as the joys, of God's poor. As a voluntary recruit of the poor Christ, he went forth in love to show poor men the dignity and promise of their low estate.

It seems that there had been a time when Francis hesitated seriously between a life of prayer and contemplation and a

⁵ I Cel., 2.

⁶ II Cel., 8-16; I Reg., 8; Spec. Perf., XIV; Bon., I, 1, 2; Tres Soc., Cap. IX; Felder, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

⁷ II Cel., 4.

⁸ Test., 6; Spec. Perf., CV; II Cel., 37.

⁹ I Cel., 71; cf. Gratien, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

career of preaching. He longed for the free, uninterrupted union with God in prayer. Yet he knew that the Christ had given himself completely to a sacrificial ministry devoted to the salvation of souls. At last Francis sent Masseo to solicit the prayers of Silvester and Clare that he might the better know God's will for him. As a result of this canvassing of the divine purpose, Francis was informed that he was to go forth to preach throughout the whole world, inasmuch as the Lord had chosen him not for himself alone, but also for the salvation of others.¹⁰ Francis, therefore, decided not to live unto himself but to win souls for Him who died for all.¹¹

His inner struggle resolved itself into a victory for the will to social usefulness instead of resulting in a triumph for selfish holiness. His observance of Christ's poverty ceased at this point to be an idealized abstraction. Francis' love for Christ's life of spiritual power, so largely independent of conventional resources, now expressed itself in a personal example of soul vitality nourished in the midst of material poverty. He had inaugurated his career of renunciation by conscious imitation of the poverty of Jesus. He made that imitation a progressive policy of life by following his Lord, likewise, in an apostolate of love for souls which had been dispossessed of the most coveted resources of social existence.¹²

The pronouncements which Francis and his brethren issued in Christ's name were simple gospel sayings, humbly uttered and personally demonstrated. They admonished men to honor and praise the members of the Holy Trinity. They exhorted their auditors to bring forth fruits worthy of penitence. They implored their hearers to confess their own sins and to forgive those of others even as they hoped to be forgiven.¹³ In the simple language of the people, and in full sympathy with the unspeakable yearnings which well up

¹⁰ Actus, XVI; Bon., XII, 1-2.

¹² Gratien, *op. cit.*, pp. 31, 46-47.

¹¹ I Cel., 35.

¹³ II Cel., 163; I Reg., 17, 21.

in every human heart, Francis and his friars spoke the electrifying message of God's love for all men.¹⁴ Those who would were bidden to receive the eternal possessions of which none could deprive them and to which no reservation of aristocratic privilege could extend.

Francis declared that the world would decline from the Friars in direct proportion to the Friars' defection from poverty. If they embraced Lady Poverty, the world would nourish them; because they had been given to the world for salvation. He used to say, "There are mutual obligations between the world and the brethren; they owe to the world a good example, the world owes them the provision of necessities. When they belie the faith, and cease to give a good example, the world, by a just judgment, draws back its hand from them."¹⁵ The early brethren, indeed, lived lives of poverty, not merely because of personal whim nor solely on account of the urge to perfection. God had called them to this holy rule of life for the salvation of the world. In leading the way to imperishable riches, they had no cause to fear popular denial of their simple needs.¹⁶

Celano declares that Francis, "bound to Lady Poverty by an indissoluble tie, . . . looked for her dowry not in the present but in the future." As already observed, Francis took every occasion to rejoice in the immediate riches of renunciation. He must have rejoiced also, as his biographer suggests, in those Psalms referring to poverty; viz., "The patience of the poor shall not perish forever," and "Let the poor see and be glad." He could remind his neighbors that the poverty which threatened to destroy them might, after all, be a way to higher perfection and a joy in the present life.¹⁷

Nothing bulked larger in Francis' eyes than did the salva-

¹⁴ Tres Soc., 54; Bon., XII, 7-8. For thirteenth-century preaching see A. Lecoy de la Marche, *La chaire Française au moyen âge* (Paris, 1886), pp. 13, 26, 140-151.

¹⁵ II Cel., 70.

¹⁶ *The Little Flowers*, p. 105.

¹⁷ II Cel., 70.

tion of souls for which Christ deigned to hang upon the Cross. "He deemed not himself a friend of Christ unless he loved the souls that Christ loved." Out of solicitude for their eternal blessedness, he prayed, preached, and set examples of right conduct. His was an intense fellow-feeling for all who bore the stamp of God's image.¹⁸

Especially was Francis' heart drawn with sympathy and love for indigent humanity. As the father of the poor, Francis made himself like unto the poor in all things. He was stirred with sympathy for any more needy than himself. From the rich he begged clothing with which to cover the first impoverished man he met. Abuse heaped upon any destitute being disturbed him greatly. The reviler of impecunious people wronged Christ, who made himself poor in the world for the sake of all. Francis' love of the Christ, who had not where to lay his head, found its outlet in service to his poor neighbor for whom Christ died.¹⁹

Francis respected all men, rich and poor. He exhibited proper reverence for prelates, elders, the rich, and the well-born. No harsh judgment was to be passed on those brethren, born of the common Father, whose lives knew not renunciation and poverty. He deemed himself subject to all. Toward the poor, however, he felt an inward yearning.²⁰

Francis' love of God led him to the voluntary adoption of the poverty which Christ has chosen. The practical application of his ideal involved the love and service of the poor, whom Christ had comforted in their sorrows.²¹ The poverty which Francis and his followers professed became the motivation for an impromptu program of rare social quality. The early brethren shrank from no situation, avoided no class, ignored no individual. They went to the country and small villages. They preached and heard confession in the open

¹⁸ II Cel., 172.

¹⁹ I Cel., 76.

²⁰ Tres Soc., 57-58, 45.

²¹ Dubois, *op. cit.*, p. 35; E. Gebhart, *Mystics and Heretics in Italy at the End of the Middle Ages* (London, 1922), pp. 108-109.

fields. The towns became the center of their most constant activities. The Franciscans repudiated the feudal wealth and isolated quarters of earlier monasticism for the press and struggle of aspiring town classes. They shared the miseries and fostered the hopes of the proletariat. They extended their sympathies to the artisans and the lower burghers, whose due rights were often ignored or perverted by church and civil authorities.

Francis' ideal of poverty received its practical test where the extremes of poverty and wealth, with the consequences of each, were most apparent. Franciscan life became an integral part of the new town civilization in which were mingled bourgeois aggressiveness, social differentiation, widespread suffering, and the restless longing for life, liberty, and mystical experience. Francis' apostolate of Christian charity here encountered human misery and deathless hopes in a setting of passion and greed. Out of love for his poor neighbors, many of whom were wretched and diseased, Francis proclaimed the simple words of human sympathy and exemplified the spirit of evangelical brotherhood which God sent his Son to announce.

Without any thought of disrupting the existing social order, Francis led his friars to a ministry of preaching, healing, and charity. The sufferings of the poor were thereby assuaged; and the responsibility to those who had *not* was impressed upon those who *had*. Only with the salvation of others could the spiritual sons of St. Francis make sure of the happy destiny of their souls. With their personal example of simplicity and joyous usefulness, the early friars proved what satisfying returns poverty could make to those who knew its potentialities for peace and happiness. While the clergy were selfishly preoccupied with secular affairs, the Franciscans nourished the souls of poor men starved for human kindness and the gospel message of love and peace. In the marts of trade and on the roads of the countryside, Francis and his

merry troupe brought hope to the rejected classes, with whom they labored, and a challenge to the proud nobles, from whom they begged alms.²²

Francis did not seek to make his own ideal and way of life compulsory for all men. He exhibited, for comparison with the superficial things which men desired, the eternal values which inhere in a life divorced from materialistic ambitions. He made no direct attack on the rich and the great. By his own simple life of renunciation he evoked that subconscious longing for beauty, peace, and the ideal which lay dormant in many of the most unscrupulous accumulators of wealth and power. In discharging the responsibility which he accepted as a guide to life's abiding values, he was saved from making of his poverty ideal a mere meaningless abstraction.²³

For the rich—who, no less than the poor, were his brethren—he had a word of solemn warning against the lust for gain with its insidious lure to injustice and oppression.²⁴ He impressed upon everyone the fact that “man loses all he leaves in this world, but he takes away with him the fruits of his charity and the alms he has scattered.” For such charity the Lord was sure to give recompense and just reward. Justice and mercy were to be the standards of those intrusted with the responsibility of judgment. Oppression and injustice carried with them their own fatal consequence of scandal and discord.²⁵ Francis' very life of contented poverty was an open challenge to those who allowed themselves to be harnessed to dull care by insatiable cupidity and corrosive avarice.

Francis' own voluntary fellowship with the poor gave him

²² For the Franciscan ministry to the towns and to the poor, consult H. Pirenne, *op. cit.*, p. 173; Thompson, *Economic and Social History*, pp. 644-645; Fr. de Sessevalle, *Histoire générale de l'ordre de Saint François* (Puy-En-Velay, 1937), II¹, 3-22; H. Holzapfel, *Handbuch der Geschichte des Franziskanerordens* (Freiburg i/B, 1909), pp. 230-231.

²³ Salvatorelli, *op. cit.*, pp. 155-156.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 103; Epist. ad fideles, 12; II Cel., 47; I Reg., 22.

²⁵ Epist. ad fideles, 5; Spec. Perf., CV.

the right to remind them that they, in their poverty, were not beyond the reach of God's care; that they were, like God's humbler creatures, in the hands of the Lord, whose Providence supplies all. Francis felt himself commissioned by Christ to offer, to all his poor, those riches which alone bring real happiness—the riches of pure air, brilliant sunshine, verdant fields, peace among neighbors, and faith in God. Here again, Francis' own example was his best argument for those everlasting goods which no man can have because of his material riches and of which no man can be deprived because of his poverty.

Francis wanted to see in men something more than mere slaves to economic activity, to which human dignity and happiness were sacrificed in the process of acquisition and accumulation. In the midst of the very economic forces so often perversive of personality, the Saint made of his creative ideal of poverty a positive source of personal enrichment. Francis helped men to realize that the door through which happiness enters the soul must be opened from within by the individual himself. Through his example of outer deprivation united with gladness from within, Francis demonstrated that men could be happy without those artificial riches so generally sought after. Through their poverty, life's disinherited ones received a new legacy of sufficiency and contentment in the very environment which was previously so suggestive of their deficiency and misery. The release which he helped the poor to negotiate was not one of escape by revolution against existing authority, but was that which comes from within for the better upbuilding of outer peace among men, rich and poor alike.²⁶

To see in Francis and his early followers social reformers of the modern stamp is to superimpose modern thought forms and techniques upon a time which knew them not.

²⁶ Consult Spec. Perf., XXXII; Tres Soc., 58; Dubois, *op. cit.*, pp. 179-182; Verb. Admon., 15.

There was no conscious effort on the part of Francis and his brethren to evaluate scientifically the economic, political, and social ills of their day. They made no attempt to apply remedial agencies of like scientific character. They had neither the ability nor the inclination to register such intellectual and social criticism of the social order. They arose in a transition period characterized by crumbling feudal institutions and growing commercialism. There was no carefully evolved program of social reforms calculated to usher in a new society. With all of its implications for social justice and reform, their contribution was chiefly that of men "teaching to the new controllers of wealth the responsibilities of large possessions, and to the lower strata, who had lost their protectors in the upheaval and were as yet unable to fend for themselves, the blessings of poverty nobly borne."²⁷

Francis was not a leveler seeking to abolish the regular gradations of society; he was interested, rather, in seeing rich and poor, humble and great, fill their respective stations in a way befitting the dignity and function of each. In such a society the poor man might honor the lowly station which Christ himself had glorified; the rich man might fulfill his destiny while communicating to his neighbor; both would be able to live in peace and harmony. Francis' new evaluation of the dignity and nobility which reside in poverty and his ceaseless efforts to foster the spirit of justice and mercy in the dealings of both rich and poor did infuse into existing society a new moral tone. It is clear that he had no well-balanced solution for the social difficulties of thirteenth-century life. In lieu of this, he at least contributed a fecund idealism which advanced human happiness irrespective of environmental limitations.

Perhaps the Saint's efforts had issue in the greater democratization of contemporary life. Such results, if really attained, were not the consequence of involved statecraft or the

²⁷ Davison, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

systematic adjudication of social wrongs on the basis of evidence carefully weighed. They were, rather, the products of moral suasion exercised by a man of catholic spirit and pacific soul.²⁸

Francis probably did little to solve the intricate problems of social intercourse. He did devote his life, in poverty of body and spirit, to the preaching of peace in the soul and to the propagation of concord among men. He believed that he had a divine commission to extend to men the greeting: "The Lord give you peace."²⁹ The amazement and resentment which this form of address sometimes aroused only added to his determination to persevere in the salutation for which he believed nobles and princes would one day show reverence to the Friars.³⁰

In his *Canticle of the Sun* Francis cried out, "Happy are those who abide in peace, for by Thee, Most High, they will be crowned."³¹ He hailed as blessed those true peacemakers who, in the midst of everything which they suffered in this world, served peace in soul and body for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. Inner peace was greatly advanced by poverty of spirit. Outer peace waited upon the moderation of men's uncontrolled passion to possess.³² Bonaventura rhetorically declares that Francis "preached the gospel of peace and salvation unto men, himself an Angel of the true peace, ordained of God to follow in the likeness of the Forerunner, that, preparing in the desert the way of sublimest Poverty, he might preach repentance by his ensample and words alike."³³

Celano records that when the number of the brethren had reached eight, Francis sent them out two by two, having

²⁸ Salvatorelli, *op. cit.*, p. 176; Holzapfel, *op. cit.*, pp. 230-231.

²⁹ ". . . Dominus det tibi pacem" (Test., 6); Leg. ant., 98 b; Spec. Perf., XXVI, 8; Bon., III, 2.

³⁰ Spec. Perf., XXVI, 9-13.

³¹ *Writings*, p. 119; cf. Boehmer, *op. cit.*, p. 66, ll. 17-18.

³² Verb. Admon., 14, 15; Beaufreton, *St. François*, p. 121.

³³ Bon., Prologue, 1.

admonished them to despise the world, to have their bodies and wills in subjection, and to announce to men peace and repentance for the remission of sins.³⁴ He was careful that his brothers should have yet more fully in their hearts that peace which they proclaimed with their mouths. He warned: "Let none through you be stirred up unto wrath, or unto offense, but let all men be stirred up through your gentleness unto peace, goodwill, and mercy."³⁵

So constant was Francis in his spirit and proclamation of peace to all he met that "many who had been haters alike of peace and of salvation, embraced peace with their whole heart, the Lord working with them, and themselves became children of peace and zealots of eternal salvation."³⁶

If Francis and his brethren found renunciation of the will and poverty of spirit to be indispensable to the inner peace of the soul, they probably discovered also, as legend suggests, that voluntary poverty of outer things may advance external peace. When the Bishop of Assisi declared that Francis' proposed way of life seemed hard and harsh, Francis replied, "My lord, if we should have possessions, we should need arms to protect ourselves. For thence arise disputes and law suits, and for this cause the love of God and of our neighbor is wont oftentimes to be hindered, wherefore we be minded to possess naught of worldly goods in this world."³⁷

Voluntary poverty for Francis thus became the earnest of true peace, internal and external. As he looked upon the devastation wrought by feudal wars, urban strife, and class struggles, he must have reflected, indeed, that all this was the outgrowth of the desire to monopolize lands, money, and human services. This competitive madness seemed to him to be based upon a distorted evaluation of temporal power and material goods. In the desire to protect their acquisitions, men violated God's love and their neighbors' rights. Francis

³⁴ I Cel., 29.

³⁵ Tres Soc., 58.

³⁶ I Cel., 23; cf. Bon., III, 2; Tres. Soc., 26.

³⁷ Tres Soc., 35.

resolved to promote the cause of peace by rejecting for himself, and causing others to regard less highly, the goods for which humanity contended.

Francis embraced the ideal which, he thought, most completely and simply removed the basis for personal and social discord. In his reappraisal of values, material goods became mere incidentals to reality; the acquisitive spirit led to crimes against those dependent upon God's common bounty; feudal oaths and weapons facilitated assaults upon the children of God's love. Whether considered in relation to the feudal nexus, the imperial-papal struggle, or the urban strife between *Majores* and *Minores*, Francis' ideal minimized the importance of the very things for which men fought. He substituted for the invidious competition in material things the spirit of fraternal co-operation in a life of simple needs, joyously and peacefully satisfied.

Something of the nature of Francis' witness for peace through preaching and moral exhortation is suggested by Thomas of Spalato's account of the Saint's sermon at Bologna in 1220.³⁸ In a spontaneous discourse on "Angels, Men, Demons," he spoke to almost the whole population, there assembled, upon the abolition of enmities and the cementing of peaceful alliances. In spite of his unprepossessing appearance, Francis, by effective words, recalled to the counsels of peace many nobles hitherto famed for their sanguinary activities.

It will be noted that in the foregoing instance this salutary result was achieved through the exercise of moral influence and the invocation of religious sanctions only. The commendable action upon which his hearers decided was the product of individual consciences awakened by the inspiring witness of a devoted life, rather than the commitment of bargaining parties to the treaty terms of a statesman. "With

³⁸ "Ex Thomae historia pontificum Salonitanorum et Spalatensium" (Boehmer, *op. cit.*, p. 106); Sabatier, *Life*, p. 241.

politics, either ecclesiastical or secular, Brother Francis concerned himself not at all." It is hardly likely that he allowed himself to become really entangled in the internal controversies of the communes to the extent, at least, of collaborating in diplomatic negotiations or participating in democratic uprisings. His brethren bore the same name as one party to city conflicts—the *Minores*. Francis had not adopted the name, however, as a badge of his allegiance to any social or political party, but as a perpetual reminder that his friars were Christ's lesser brethren devoted to the service of all.³⁹ As such they must often have sought to do service for the *little people* of town and country.

Of course Francis' passion for amity and concord would not let him dissociate himself from those social relationships of which politics and government were integral parts. As Salvatorelli says, however, Francis' peace activity "remained purely religious and individual; individual even when he spoke to the multitude, because he appealed to every man's inner conscience and not to hierarchies and social institutions. Francis contented himself with preaching spiritual peace, the pacific attitude of mind; he did not concern himself to lay down conditions for the readmission of the banished party and the distribution of the offices of state."⁴⁰

Francis is generally regarded as having played a rather important, though perhaps indirect, part in the conciliation of Assisan *Majores* and *Minores* in 1210.⁴¹ The quarrel between warring factions was composed in a way most auspicious for communal peace, with safeguards to democratic liberties and the rights of weaker groups often oppressed. Francis' name does not appear in the articles of peace of 1210, nor is there sufficient documentary evidence to show the nature and degree of his participation in the affair. His

³⁹ Salvatorelli, *op. cit.*, p. 149; Bon., VI, 5; I Reg., 4.

⁴⁰ Salvatorelli, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

⁴¹ For parts of the compact of 1210, together with discussions of it, see Sabatier, *Life*, pp. 117-119; Salvatorelli, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-151.

ministry of peace by word and example can easily be conceived, however, as having brought to bear on all concerned the spirit of gospel harmony and love to which, in their poverty of spirit and possessions, his own *Minores* were dedicated with him. Behind the political provisions which wrote into Assisan annals the rights of lesser, as well as of greater, people there probably lay the unassuming example and evangelical principles with which Francis inspired his contemporaries to greater civic justice.

Upon a later occasion Francis is supposed to have effected a reconciliation between the Bishop and the Podesta of Assisi. Legendary accounts say that from his sickbed he dictated an addition to the *Praise of Creatures* in the form of a benediction upon those performing acts of peace and pardon. When Francis' messengers sang this verse of pacification, the Podesta and the Bishop made mutual confession of fault and implored each other's forgiveness. With an embrace of love they sealed their pact of peace.⁴²

Francis' biographers record his lament over the evil deeds committed by the Perugians against their neighbors. He beheld the vengeance of the Lord which was about to break forth by the divine sword, raised against such wrong. While Francis was preaching to the people assembled at Perugia, armed knights rode up after their wonted manner, thus hindering the word of God with warlike sports. Francis boldly rebuked them and pointed out their folly. The Lord had exalted them over all, for which they ought to have been more kind to neighbors and most thankful to God. Instead, they were to be seen plundering and killing their neighbors. For this action Francis prophesied dire punishment from God in the form of internal dissension. Celano naïvely records that a few days later "discord arose among them; neighbours took up arms against neighbours; the burghers attacked the knights; the nobles in their turn fell upon the plebeians; and

⁴² Spec. Perf., CI.

at last they fought with such fury, and there was such slaughter, that the very neighbours around, whom they had wronged, grieved with them."⁴³

Francis probably witnessed all too much of this aggressiveness which grew out of the possessive instincts of an age both feudal and urban. To all such situations he brought that peace which he first exemplified in his own heart and then preached everywhere. He was no supercilious judge passing on the acts of others. The legendary accounts of his public peace activities are grossly misleading if taken to mean that Francis summoned both parties before him, heard their long-drawn-out contentions; then rendered judgment on the merits of the case. This he did not do. The service which he rendered was rather that of a man who introduces into the atmosphere of suspicion and altercation the serenity and purity of a soul from which emanate unselfish love and moral earnestness.⁴⁴ Francis performed the good office of one who, in the midst of everything suffered in this world, served peace in soul and body. He did this for love of the Lord Jesus Christ, who lived in poverty of spirit and of all things material.⁴⁵

The Brothers and Sisters of Penitence, who constituted the Third Order of Franciscans, probably owed their organization and rule to Cardinal Ugolini rather than to Francis.⁴⁶

⁴³ II Cel., 37; Spec. Perf., CV, 13, reads, interestingly enough: "Et milites, cum Ecclesia quae juvabat eos, devastaverunt agros et vineas et arbores eorum et omnia mala quae poterant facere populo faciebant."

⁴⁴ Sabatier, *Franciscan Essays*, p. 3; Jørgensen, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

⁴⁵ Verb. Admon., 15, 14.

⁴⁶ The "*Regula et vita fratrum vel sororum poenitentium*" (hereinafter cited as Reg. paen.) may be studied in Boehmer, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-82, and in *Writings*, pp. 104-114. Cf. P. Mandonnet, *Les Règles et le Gouvernement de l'Ordo de Poenitentia au XIII siècle* (Opuscules de critique historique, t. I, Paris, 1902). The rule probably represents the work of Cardinal Ugolini and of subsequent revisionists who were interested in adapting ideals such as Francis cherished to the practical needs of devoted Christians and to the cause of the institutional Church. For discussions of the Order and of the Rule, see A. van den Wyngaert, "De Tertio Ordine S. Francisci," *AFH*, XIII (1920), 3-77, esp. pp. 76-77; Beaufreton, *St. François*, pp. 226-235;

It was from the Poverello, however, that they received the impulse to a life of simplicity, mercy, and peace.⁴⁷ Men and women living in normal family relations were thus enabled to attain personal sanctification and to practice the social virtues of justice, charity, and peace, while giving to the world an example of chastened desires and humble service.⁴⁸

Modesty of dress, abstinence from questionable diversions, and moderation in satisfying physical desires were to be invaluable parts of their vital message to the world in which they lived.⁴⁹ Lives of inner devotion, prayer, and confession had practical issue in works of mercy and love.⁵⁰ At their regular community gatherings they heard the Divine Word and contributed in ordinary coins to the needs of their own poor, to indigent people in the community, and to the general church needs of the region.⁵¹ Every effort was made to forestall strife and wrong proceeding from financial maladjustments. No one might enter the fraternity without having paid his debts. He had to become reconciled with his neighbor and to make restitution of all goods wrongfully acquired.⁵² Those entitled to make wills were urged to do so within three months of making their profession, lest they die intestate.⁵³ Any disputes within the group or in connection with the perversion of their rights by general public or authorities were to be kept, if at all possible, within the juris-

G. J. Reinmann, *The Third Order Secular of St. Francis* (Washington, D. C., 1928). L. Le Monnier, *Histoire de Saint François d'Assise* (7th ed.; Paris, 1922), II, 8-40, has a good discussion of the Tertiaries. Consult also the helpful summary of Fr. Marion Habig, *Catholic Leadership Toward Social Progress—The Third Order*, pp. 122-131; cf. F. Callaey, *The Third Order of St. Francis: A Historical Essay* (Pittsburgh, 1926).

⁴⁷ See Van Ortoy in *Analecta Bollandiana* (hereinafter cited as *Anal. Boll.*), XXVI (1907), 362; G. Schnürer, *Die Vertiefung des religiösen Lebens im Abendlande zur Zeit der Kreuzzüge, Franz von Assisi* (München, 1905), p. 106.

⁴⁸ Beaufreton, *St. François*, pp. 232-235.

⁴⁹ Reg. paen., I-III.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, IV-VI, XIII, VIII, IX.

⁵² *Ibid.*, X, 6-8; XIII, 11-12.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, VII; XIII, 6-7.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, X, 1.

diction of the brethren, the ministers, and the bishops. Scandals between the Religious and laymen were to be avoided at any cost.⁵⁴

The members of the fraternity were called upon to pay the tithes which they owed and should owe in future.⁵⁵ Gregory IX released them, however, from the payment of unjust taxes and from the obligation to accept public office. A blow was thus struck at the more onerous exactions of urban and feudal society.⁵⁶

The Tertiaries, who were admonished to humility of spirit and lives of simplicity, were likewise prohibited from taking up arms against any one.⁵⁷ So popular did the Order become, because of its privilege of peace, that men flocked into it in order to escape their obligations for feudal military service. In 1289 Tertiaries were permitted to bear arms in defense of country, church, the faith of Christ, and for reasons approved by the ministers.⁵⁸

Another provision absolved the brethren from every solemn oath, "except in the case of necessity according to the exceptions established by the Sovereign Pontiff in his act of concession, namely for peace, faith, calumny, and witness."⁵⁹ A blow was thus directed at the feudal oath which obligated the vassal to support his lord in military enterprise, be that enterprise the guerrilla raids of a small noble or an offensive campaign of the emperor.⁶⁰ Frederick II fought grimly against the order which withdrew from him a large part of his military support. He recognized in the Tertiaries the natural allies of the papacy and of the rebellious town classes

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, X, 2-3; XII; XIII, 8-15. For Pope Gregory IX's defense of the Tertiaries against the aggression of civil rulers, see Boehmer, *op. cit.*, p. 76, n. 2.

⁵⁵ Reg. paen., VI, 2.

⁵⁶ Reinmann, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

⁵⁷ Reg. paen., VI, 3.

⁵⁸ Reinmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 58, 64.

⁵⁹ Reg. paen., VI, 4; Breve Greg., 1228, sec. 4, Boehmer, *op. cit.*, p. 77 nn.; Reinmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-64; H. Felder, *Die Ideale des hl. Franz von Assisi* (Paderborn, 1923), p. 352.

⁶⁰ Felder, *Franz von Assisi*, pp. 352-356; Schnürer, *Franz von Assisi*, pp. 107-108.

which were set against him. Frederick's failure to reduce the towns to subjection was probably due, in part, to the active participation of the Tertiaries in the struggle for communal liberties.⁶¹

Though the original neutrality of the Brotherhood of Penitence was not long maintained in its absolute form, and though the Tertiaries did bear arms in causes which the church held sacred, these Brothers and Sisters of Penitence infused into society a new spirit of peace and unity. The modification of their own wants, the joyous service to poor people, and the sober use of material things for the good of sick and despised humanity constituted a ministry which Francis must have coveted for all his brethren in the world.⁶²

In the words which he preached, by the life which he lived, through the social movements which he inspired, Francis held up to the world's gaze the banner of unselfish service enriched by voluntary poverty.

⁶¹ Le Monnier, *op. cit.*, II, 25-42; Felder, *Franz von Assisi*, pp. 352-355.

⁶² Sabatier, *Life*, pp. 267-268; Nesta de Robeck, *Among the Franciscan Tertiaries* (New York, 1930), pp. 15-17.

CHAPTER IV

THE BIBLE AND THE APOSTOLATE OF POVERTY

THE BIBLE which Francis read in the church's language and heard in its services of worship was central in his career of renunciation. He probably learned to read from it under the tutelage of the priest of St. George in the village of Assisi.¹ From the Bible as he heard it read in the Mass and expounded by the priest of the Portiuncula he received his call to evangelical poverty.²

His vocation was confirmed by the book of the Gospels which he consulted at the altar in the church of St. Nicholas.³ His primitive rule of life, which Innocent III orally approved, was biblical in form and phrase.⁴ Later rules had their inspiration from the Scriptures also.⁵ The Bible was the one book in his life. He read, studied, and quoted from it extensively. His writings were full of it.⁶ He had based

¹ Cf. Sessevalle, *op. cit.*, I, 245; and Gratien, *Saint François*, pp. 9 f.

² I Cel., 22, gives the following account: "Sed cum die quadam Evangelium, qualiter Dominus miserit discipulos suos ad praedicandum, in eadem ecclesia legeretur, et sanctus Dei assistens ibidem utcumque verba evangelica intellexisset, celebratis missarum solemnibus, a sacerdote sibi exponi evangelium suppliciter postulavit.—Qui cum ei cuncta per ordinem enarrasset, audiens sanctus Franciscus Christi discipulos non debere *aurum* sive *argentum* seu *pecuniam possidere, non peram, non sacculum, non panem, non virgam in via portare, non calceamenta, non duas tunicas habere, sed regnum Dei et poenitentiam praedicare, continuo exsultans in spiritu Dei: 'Hoc est, inquit, quod volo, hoc est quod quaero, hoc totis medullis cordis facere concupisco.'*" Cf. Matt. 10:1-42; Luke 9:1-6, 10:1-16; Mark 6:7-12.

³ I Cel., 15; Bon., III, 3.

⁴ I Cel., 32; I Reg., Introd., *et passim*; Test., 4.

⁵ I Reg.; II Reg., 1.

⁶ See E. D'Oisy, "S. François, la Bible et l'Évangile," *Études Franciscaines*, XXXIX (1927), 498-529, 646-656, and XL (1928), 69-80, for an extended and very helpful study of Francis' use of the Bible. Cf. Gilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 47 f., and Gratien, *Histoire*, pp. 83, n. 13, and ff.

his life of renunciation on the book of the Gospels. He had no intention of surrendering it for any other.⁷

Learned men were astonished at his biblical comprehension.⁸ He depended utterly upon this word of God. Upon his deathbed his whole soul was so full of it that he felt no need to have it read further.⁹ The spiritual testament which he left his followers urged them to preserve inviolate the poverty to which Christ in the Bible had called them and in which the church had confirmed them.¹⁰

It may be that Francis sensed the scriptural message more readily than he translated its Latin words. He seems to have been reasonably capable of doing both.¹¹ He himself took comfort in the knowledge that he was a simple, unlearned man who knew the Bible not by his own skill but with the aid of the Divine, to whom he humbly surrendered himself. He was in no doubt as to the Gospel's meaning for him. It said quite clearly: " 'If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me,' and again, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up the cross and follow me.' " ¹² He did not interpret this command as a precept binding on all men but as a counsel of perfection for a voluntary few. It was as inescapable for him and the *little flock*, which Christ had intrusted to him, as its promises of their heavenly reward were sure.¹³ They were responsible for both the precepts and the counsels of Jesus.¹⁴ Francis believed that Christ's Gospel came before all else and that its

⁷ II Cel., 62; I Reg., 22.

⁸ II Cel., 103.

⁹ II Cel., 105.

¹⁰ Test., 4, 11, 12.

¹¹ Gilson, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

¹² I Reg., 1; Matt. 19:21; 16:24. Direct references to, and English translations of, the Bible will be given in the Rheims-Douay Version, unless otherwise indicated. This version provides an easily accessible, authorized translation of the Vulgate. Francis' quotations of the Bible are given in the appropriate Latin text or English translation of his edited works.

¹³ I Cel., 27-28; II Cel., 55; Spec. Perf., XXVI, X.

¹⁴ Epist. ad fideles, 7.

primary prerequisite for the brethren was poverty.¹⁵ The renunciation to which they were called was all-inclusive; their commitment once made was irrevocable; their covenant with Christ, who had given them their gospel rule, was eternal.¹⁶

Francis took the Bible literally. It meant just what it said. But he interpreted it freely; it said more than words alone could express. He emphasized the apostle's warning that "the letter killeth, but the spirit quickeneth."¹⁷ The letter did indeed kill those who paraded their mastery of the Bible words but ignored the spirit. The spirit liberated those who sought beneath and beyond all words the living Christ and his proffered resources.¹⁸

Francis took literally the Gospel command to give up father and family.¹⁹ He laid hold confidently upon the Heavenly Father's bounty. He was prepared to accept in freedom, but without recourse to idleness, the Psalmist's invitation: "Cast thy care upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee." Poverty gave him that right.²⁰

But Francis' uncritical acceptance of the Bible was no mere emphasis on words. With the freedom of a creative imagination, he transcended the Bible letter to receive the deeper revelation of its spirit. He believed that it delivered to him, in his humility, a clear message undisclosed to proud searchers after human wisdom.²¹ Worldly wisdom spoke much and

¹⁵ II Cel., 216; *Chronica Fratris Iordani a Iano*, No. 2, in *Analecta Franciscana* (hereinafter abbreviated as *Anal. Fran.*), I, 2.

¹⁶ I Reg., 2; II Cel., 208, 55. Cf. Bartolommeo de Pisa's, *De Conformatate vitae Beati Francisci ad vitam Domini nostri Jesu Christi*, Fructus IX, in *Anal. Fran.*, IV, 372-373. This work, which gives rather extravagant emphasis to the conformity of Francis' poverty with that of Christ, explores a vast range of primitive sources and quotes them with remarkable accuracy.

¹⁷ II Cor. 3:6.

¹⁸ Verb. Admon., 7.

¹⁹ I Reg., 1; Matt. 19:29; II Cel., 12; see G. Batault, "Saint François d'Assise," *Mercure de France* (Oct., 1926), pp. 22-25.

²⁰ Ps. 54:23. All references to the Psalms are in the order of the Rheims-Douay Version, unless otherwise indicated; cf. I Cel., 29; Verb. Admon., 3; Luke 14:33; I Reg., 22.

²¹ II Cel., 102.

gave little of itself. Knowledge of divine mysteries was the gift of God to those who renounced all in poverty and simplicity.²² The Friars were not called to a vain display of human learning so very puny at its best.²³ Others might read a thousand volumes. They needed no books save the Bible and the service manuals of the church. Their poverty and humility were the only preparation which they needed to fit themselves for the reception of the Bible's secrets and the carrying out of its special commission. Beyond the legitimate range of services intrusted to learned doctors lay the Friars' distinctive mission to humanity on the eve of a new spiritual era.²⁴ To them would be revealed the mysteries known to others in parables only.²⁵

Such men enjoyed special freedom that they might render unique service. They were the chosen apostles of Christ and his Gospel.²⁶ They must greet the world with the biblical salutation: "The Lord give you peace."²⁷ They, above all men, were free to release God's trenchant word. It alone could judge, destroy, and redeem.²⁸ Illumined as they were by divine revelation itself, they dared not be slaves to the Bible with whose spirit they sought to free their hearers.²⁹ Francis did not worship the Bible or teach them to do so. He gave the only copy of the New Testament which the Order possessed to an old begging woman for whom they had nothing else. She could at least sell it and relieve her necessity. Francis felt that this sacrifice of the material form was in keeping with the spiritual preservation of the Holy Word, which counseled renunciation for the sake of others.³⁰ One

²² I Reg., 17; Spec. Perf., IV.

²³ Verb. Admon., 5; II Reg., 10.

²⁴ II Cel., 185, 62, 163, 195; Spec. Perf., LXVIII, LXXI, LXXII; Test., 3.

²⁵ Spec. Perf., IV; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10.

²⁶ I Reg., 22; II Cel., 163.

²⁷ Test. 6; I Reg., 14.

²⁸ II Reg., 9; Rom. 9:28; cf. P. L. Oliger's critical edition of Angelo Clareno's *Expositio Regulae Fratrum Minorum* (hereinafter referred to as Expos. Reg.) (Quaracchi, 1912), Cap. IX, pp. 196-197.

²⁹ II Cel., 102; Spec. Perf., IV.

³⁰ II Cel., 91.

who thus engraved the Gospel in his heart needed no constant perusal of its symbols. On an occasion when Francis was suffering great pain, a brother called forth the following conversation: "Father, thou has ever fled for refuge to the Scriptures, they have ever furnished remedies for thy pains: I pray thee now also to have something read to thee from the Prophets, and perhaps thy spirit will rejoice in the Lord.' The Saint replied: 'It is good to read the testimonies of Scripture, it is good to seek out our Lord God in them; but for myself, I have already mastered so much of the Scriptures that I have an ample store for meditation and reflection. I need no more, my son: I know Christ, the poor man crucified.'"³¹

Christ had lived in poverty, and the Bible perpetuated his spirit. Together they filled Francis' every need. For him the Bible ceased to be merely a book to be read or a series of words brought abruptly to an end. Here was a divine-human story still in the making, a cosmic history awaiting full consummation. It was a continuing procession of immortal spirits which he might join in their progress along the divine way. Christ was their leader, and the church of God was their eternal home. The Scriptures were thus Christ's open way; in that way Francis lived and marched with undying patriarchs, prophets, and apostles.

Francis became associated with these Bible characters and blessed Fathers in the liturgy of the church.³² In its worship he had received his poverty commission. Its sacred dramas helped to make the men and women of the Scriptures more real to him. He had perfect confidence in the church as the

³¹ II Cel., 105. Leg. ant. cap. 73: "Fratr, tantam dulcedinem et consolationem invenio cotidie, in mea memoria ex meditatione humilitatis vestigiorum Filii Dei, quod si usque in finem seculi viverem, non multum necesse esset mihi alias scripturas audire vel meditari."

³² A stimulating treatment of this point is that of P. Sabatier, *Vie de S. François D'Assise* (Paris, 1931), pp. xl-xli, xlvii. See also his *Études inédites sur S. François d'Assise*, ed. Arnold Goffin (Paris, 1932), pp. 53-59.

interpreter of holy books and holy men. Missal and Breviary recorded the divine mystery drama of Bible life and sacred history. Sabatier has wisely remarked that the Bible in the Vulgate translation, which Francis knew, was "before all a document, the document of the Christian revelation, or if one prefers, the document of the history of God's people."³³ But he observes also that in the liturgy, and above all in the Mass, this Bible document became the Bible life. The Bible document was a veritable museum of religious annals compiled throughout human history. In the liturgy this museum became powerfully alive. The church, through her sacred cult, conducted her spiritual children into this glorious and continuing experience of a living Bible. In that awesome worship Francis found the church to be not only a living past, but also a vital present and an elect future. The heart of that church was God's Book opened in his name. Every Christian of Francis' day was privileged to feel the pulsations of the divine life in the living Word of the worshiping church. Few acknowledged their grateful dependence upon that Word as he did.³⁴ He made careful provision that true Catholic worship should be properly observed in his brotherhood. The divine Office, Praises, Prayers, and Fasts were all to be performed in accordance with a well-regulated plan.³⁵ The Psalter, from which Breviaries were permitted, was in itself a reservoir of poems, hymns, historic epics, and didactic passages. In this hymn book of universal Christian experience were the agonizing pleas of God's poor and the record of his care for them.³⁶ In the service books available to the Friars were choice readings from the Holy Word, homilies on the Scripture from the greatest Fathers of the church, and

³³ *Études*, pp. 56-57.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-57.

³⁵ I Reg., 3, 20; II Reg., 3; Test., 3, 4; Felder, *Geschichte der wissenschaftlichen Studien*, pp. 76-78.

³⁶ Francis was especially fond of Ps. 68:33: "Let the poor see and rejoice; seek ye God, and your soul shall live." The extent to which he entered into the life of the Psalms is suggested by the use made of them in his *Office of the Passion*. Cf. *Opuscula*, pp. 127 ff.; II Cel., 96.

edifying accounts of martyrs and saints. Everywhere the lives of humble and exalted Christians were joined in closest proximity to the life of the Bible.

But it was in the Mass especially that Francis experienced the power of the living Scripture. In its Gospel readings Christ had first issued to him the call to renunciation. In its sacrifice Christ offered himself utterly, in complete renunciation, for the salvation of all men. It is little wonder that Francis loved to read the Gospel lesson as he participated in the Mass. He insisted on hearing from the Missal the Gospel of the day's celebration, when he could not take part in the service. It is quite understandable that he should join himself, whenever possible, to Christ's living expression of Bible poverty. The sacrificial life of Christ in the Mass was the consummation of that poor life on earth which the Bible had recorded. In the Bible document the historic Jesus stood revealed; in the Bible drama of the Mass the cosmic redeemer was disclosed.³⁷

Thus, through the liturgical church, a dramatic visualization of the Bible was made possible to Francis and his age. In holy worship the entire church of all eras gathered about Christ in familial association. The characters of Bible times stepped out of the sacred pages and mingled with him and his present worshippers.

This dramatic focus of Bible characters intensified Francis' conviction of his own peculiar destiny. He firmly believed that God's will for him was as purposive and fateful as it had ever been for patriarchs and apostles. In obedience to that will he followed the special way of poverty which Christ had pioneered.³⁸ It was just because he was so vile

³⁷ *Epistola ad capitulum generale* (hereinafter cited as *Epist. ad cap. gen.*), 1-4; Boehmer, *op. cit.*; I Cel., 22; Tres Soc., 28-29; *Chronica a Fratris Nicolae Glassberger Ordinis Minorum Observantium, Anal. Fran.*, II, 4-6; Spec. Perf., CXVII; Sabatier, *Études*, pp. 47-49; A. Léon, *Saint François d'Assise et son œuvre, histoire de l'ordre des frères mineurs des origines à nos jours* (Paris, 1928), p. 16; cf. Sabatier, *Le Speculum Perfectionis*, II (1931), xxxiv.

³⁸ Ps. 39:8-9; I Cel., 107.

an earthen vessel that he could bear in himself the divine treasure. Because of his personal surrender he could be God's instrument for the continuance of that cosmic project which Bible heroes had initiated.³⁹

It is not strange that so lively a spiritual imagination as that of Francis should discover its destiny in relation to the whole Bible experience. It was as if he recognized in the characters and episodes of biblical times the foreshadowed meaning of his own prophetic career. Bible leaders emerged as his own contemporaries in a divine association. The Bible into which he looked was a mirror where his own special dedication was reflected. The words of God's ancient servants trembled into renewed articulateness upon his lips. His men of poverty became the legatees of a special Bible heritage of prophetic faith and sacrificial evangelism.⁴⁰

Francis found in the Old Testament the prefiguration of the New. He discovered in both the special commission from Christ to the Friars. They were the Lord's poor preachers of repentance and of the coming kingdom. Francis' whole life was devoted to a literal, yet free, interpretation of those biblical passages that had special reference to the Minors' destiny. In moments of crisis he remembered the words, "Blessed be the Lord my God, who teacheth my hands to fight and my fingers to war." They became his slogan for a spiritual battle in which the Minors' loyalty to their divine calling was their sword and shield.⁴¹

Every biblical reference to the renunciatory life became Francis' special concern. He thrilled to the Beatitudes, for they extolled the poverty which the Friars had made pecul-

³⁹ Actus, X, 7-9; II Cor. 4:7.

⁴⁰ Sabatier, *Études*, p. 53; *Vie* (1931), xlv-xlvii.

⁴¹ Ps. 143:1. Iordano, in his Chronicle, *Anal. Fran.*, I, 6, recalls how Francis used the reference at the Chapter General of 1221. "In hoc (1221) capitulo beatus Franciscus assumpto themate: *Benedictus Dominus Deus meus, qui docet manus meas ad praelium*, fratribus praedicavit, et docens virtutes et monens ad patientiam et ad exempla mundo demonstranda."

ially their own in their preparation for Christ's kingdom.⁴² When he prayed the Lord's Prayer, he called upon a Father for whom he had veritably renounced his earthly parent.⁴³ "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things shall be added unto you," was the text of his daily assurance.⁴⁴ The Psalmist's declaration that "Man ate the bread of angels" seemed to him the triumphant anticipation of the Friars' alms-seeking and joyous poverty.⁴⁵

This naïve exegesis had far-reaching effects. It permitted Francis to discern in every great character and episode of the Sacred Word a suggestion of the part played by the poor Christ and his men of poverty. Thus God's promise to make Abraham a great nation was no less a pledge of his favor to these later pilgrims of faith.⁴⁶ Just as "the patriarch Jacob blessed his sons," so Francis gave a benediction to his before he died.⁴⁷ The sufferings of the servant Israel as recorded by Isaiah symbolized for Francis the passion of Christ. With that passion he was later to be associated in the Stigmata.⁴⁸ The circumstances of Jesus' nativity were a constant reminder of that poverty which the Virgin Mother shared.⁴⁹ The command of Christ to his disciples to preach repentance through renunciation was interpreted by the Poverello as his commission also.⁵⁰ Christ's prayer of consecration in which he commended his followers to the Father was seen as a clear case of solicitude for the Friars Minor as well.⁵¹ Jesus' warning to his disciples against worldly preoccupations was no less a special message to the followers of Francis.⁵²

⁴² Matt. 5:3-12; Luke 6:20-23; I Reg., 16; Verb. Admon., 14.

⁴³ II Cel., 12; I Cel., 14-15; I Reg., 1, 22; Epist. ad fideles, 9; Matt. 6:9; Batault, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁴⁴ Luke 12:31; *De religiosa habitatione in eremo*, in *Opuscula*, pp. 83-84.

⁴⁵ Ps. 77:25; Bon., VII, 8.

⁴⁶ Gen. 12:2; I Cel., 27-28.

⁴⁷ Gen., 48:14-15; I Cel., 108.

⁴⁸ Isa. 53:7; Bon., VIII, 6.

⁴⁹ II Cel., 199-200; Epist. ad fideles, 1.

⁵⁰ I Reg., 1, 14, 16; Matt. 5; Luke 10.

⁵¹ John 17:6-24; I Reg., 22.

⁵² Luke 12:15; 21:34; I Reg., 8.

Of course, the central career of both Testaments was the wholly renounced life of Christ Jesus. His poverty program which Francis saw in high relief throughout the Bible was now being continued at the divine behest. His agents to that end were the Friars Minor. For all men, it is true, but with special love for his heirs in renunciation, Christ had given up his heavenly riches and become poor. Francis and his brethren had the royal dignity of following Christ in such self-surrender.⁵³

Francis accepted Christ's invitation to search the Scriptures for testimony of him. He looked everywhere for references to Jesus.⁵⁴ Needless to say, he found them. Each carried its own suggestion of the Lord's poverty and of the Friar's obligation to it. Isaiah had spoken of one who had set himself "as a most hard rock" against his persecutors. Francis recognized this faithful servant at once as "the Lord Jesus Christ, the son of the living and omnipotent God [who] was not ashamed and was poor and a stranger, and lived on alms, he himself and the blessed virgin and his disciples."⁵⁵ In the Psalms Francis had encountered the words: "Do thou deliver me, for I am poor and needy, and my heart is troubled within me."⁵⁶ This, too, was the cry of Him who said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head."⁵⁷ How could the Friars forget the poverty of their Lord when the whole Bible was a living reminder of his sacrifice? Of his own will he had been led as a sheep to the slaughter that the world might have a remedy for sin.⁵⁸ Could his followers desert

⁵³ II Cor. 8:9; II Cel., 73: "Ego autem regalem habeo dignitatem et nobilitatem insignem, illum sequi Dominum qui cum esset dives, pro nobis egenus factus est."

⁵⁴ John 5:39. Celano reports him as saying: "Bonum est Scripturae testimonia legere, bonum est Dominum Deum nostrum in ipsis exquirere" (II Cel., 105).

⁵⁵ 50:7; I Reg., 9.

⁵⁶ Ps. 108:21-22.

⁵⁷ Matt. 8:20; Luke 9:58; II Cel., 56.

⁵⁸ Isa., 53:7.

the special way of poverty, in which the Virgin and Christ's disciples had joined him?

The prophet Ezekiel had been commissioned by the Lord to search throughout the city of Jerusalem for those that "sigh, and mourn for the abominations that are committed in the midst thereof." Upon their foreheads he was to "mark Thau." Perhaps Francis signed his dictated letters with this revered symbol. He would thus "set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry and that be truly converted unto Christ Jesus."⁵⁹ He wanted all of his brethren to be marked in spirit, especially, with this sign of Christ's cross.

Christ was the rock of the Holy Scriptures as he was the rock upon which the poor men stood. "Whence, when he [Francis] used to say that verse of the Psalms 'Thou didst exalt me on a rock' he used to say, out of his great reverence and devotion, 'under the foot of the rock thou hast exalted me.'"⁶⁰ He walked over rocks and stones with the greatest hesitancy and reverence. In every tree he was reminded of the wood of the Cross upon which Christ worked out man's salvation. In every herb and shrub there lived the symbol of "Him who is called the 'flower of the field' and 'the lily of the valley.'"⁶¹ When Francis read in the Psalms the agonizing words, "But I am a worm, and no man; the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people," he once more identified the sufferer with Jesus. In anguished memory of this Christ who was thus humbled, Francis refused to tread upon worms.⁶² But on another occasion and in buoyant mood he praised the Sun of the Heavens as a symbol of the glorious Christ. "And because he deemed and said that the sun is fairer than other created things, and is more often likened to our Lord, and that in Scripture the Lord Himself is called

⁵⁹ Ezech. 9:4; Bon., IV, 9; II Cel., 106.

⁶⁰ Ps. 60:3; I Cor. 10:4; Spec. Perf., CXVIII; Canticle of Canticles, II, 1.

⁶¹ Spec. Perf., CXVIII.

⁶² Ps. 21:7; I Cel., 80; Epist. ad fideles, 9.

'the Sun of Righteousness' therefore giving that name to those Praises which he had made of the creatures of the Lord, what time the Lord did certify him of His kingdom, he called them 'the Song of Brother Sun.'"⁶³ Christ's voluntary renunciation made him the lowliest of all creatures; his righteousness shone like the Sun. There must have been a moral in that for Francis and his brethren. They must be least who would be great in His kingdom.

The Bible as Francis read it abounded in suggestions as to the function of the Friars Minor in their preparation for the eternal realm. Christ himself had prayed the Father for a special blessing upon those whom he left in the world to continue his work. Francis interpreted that prayer as having particular reference to his brethren. To his friars he said: "Let us therefore hold fast the words, the life and doctrine and holy Gospel of Him who deigned for us to ask His Father to manifest us His Name, saying: 'Father, I have manifested Thy Name to the men whom Thou hast given Me . . . I pray not for the world, but for them whom Thou hast given Me, because they are Thine, and all My things are Thine. . . . As Thou hast sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world . . . Father, I will that where I am, they also whom Thou hast given Me may be with Me, that they may see Thy glory in Thy kingdom.'"⁶⁴ The Psalmist, too, had referred to a hope and to a portion in the land of the living. This recalled to Francis how truly poverty ought to be his friars' portion. It alone could guide them to the land of the living. He declared: "This, my dearest brothers, is the height of the most sublime poverty which has made you heirs and kings of the Kingdom of Heaven; poor in goods, but exalted in virtue. Let that [Poverty] be your

⁶³ Mal. 4:2: "But unto you that fear my name, the Sun of justice shall arise, and health in his wings. . . ." Cf. Spec. Perf., CXIX.

⁶⁴ I Reg., 22; cf. John 17:6-26. The passages quoted above are from Robinson's translation of the Rule in his edition of the *Writings*, pp. 55-60.

portion for it leads to the land of the living; cleaving to it unreservedly, my best beloved brothers, for the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, never desire to possess anything else under Heaven."⁶⁵

The lament of Koheleth that all was vanity was a sharp reminder to avoid money, that most dangerous futility and threat to kingdom entrance.⁶⁶ Most certainly, Christ's parable of the kingdom treasure, for which one might wisely sell all, emphasized that other treasure hidden in the Gospel field—that poverty which gave special access to the kingdom.⁶⁷ The occasion of the old Hebrew Passover called to Francis' mind the Friars' privilege of being true Hebrews in their historical destiny. Theirs was the joyous duty of celebrating, in poverty of spirit, the Passover of the Lord, that is to say, the passage from this world to the Father.⁶⁸

The words of the Scripture which recorded the divine destiny of past heroes also proclaimed, in advance, the unique prospects of the brethren. Hannah had sung triumphantly about the barren woman who had become the mother of many children. Francis read in these words a spiritual reference to the Friars. The childless woman who had been blessed with offspring symbolized a poor friar, simple and abased. In the barrenness of his poverty, he bore endless edification to others.⁶⁹

The Apostle Paul had wished his Christian brethren to experience the divine spirit of wisdom and revelation. Francis recalled that the Portiuncula was the place where God had illumined, with his wisdom, the hearts of his poor men.⁷⁰ Thus, an apostolic benediction was transformed at Francis' hands into an anticipation of Franciscan destiny. This is not to say that Francis interpreted the Bible words as having been uttered for him alone. It does indicate how great was

⁶⁵ II Reg., 6; Ps. 141:6.

⁶⁶ Eccles. 1:2; Luke 12:15, 21:34; I Reg., 8.

⁶⁷ Matt. 13:44; Bon., VII, 1.

⁶⁸ Exod. 12:11; Bon., VII, 9.

⁶⁹ I Kings 2:5 (I Sam. 2:5).

⁷⁰ I Cel., 106; Ephes. 1:17-18.

his conviction that the Bible phrase had, in addition to all other functions, a special applicability to the poverty ideal. The Bible in its entirety had not been written for and about him and his only. Everything in it, however, had application in larger sense to his part in the community of Bible experience.

Francis had no hesitation in claiming for his chevaliers of the Table Round the great reward offered by Christ for consistent fidelity in few and little things. Their prayerful lives and their unselfish service in poverty had aided materially in the salvation of souls.⁷¹ In fullest confidence, he appropriated, for himself and for his friars, a place in that kingdom regarding which Christ had said, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world."⁷² Certain sacred promises exalted most unreservedly the high destiny in the ultimate realm, of those who had renounced all to follow Christ. These promises were most jubilantly appropriated by the Poverello.⁷³ He was never happier than when he looked forward to joining the divine family of those who surrendered everything, the better to possess heaven.⁷⁴

That which the Bible spoke of was most certainly to be realized; it was already in the process of realization. When, therefore, Francis read the divine injunction to be ready to stand before the Son of Man, he prepared expectantly for that sure eventuality. Poverty was the Christ's way for special followers who anticipated, prepared for, and made others aware of, the coming day.⁷⁵ It was not difficult for

⁷¹ Matt. 25:21; Spec. Perf., LXXII. ⁷² I Reg., 23; Matt. 25:34.

⁷³ Matt. 19:28-29; Bon., III, 10; I Reg., 1: "Et (Mt. 19:29) 'Omnis, qui reliquerit patrem aut matrem, fratres aut sorores, uxorem aut filios, domos aut agros propter me, centuplum accipiet et vitam eternam possidebit.'"

⁷⁴ I Reg., 22, illustrates Francis' facile combination of scriptural promises in a setting of poverty idealism. See Matt. 23:8-10.

⁷⁵ Luke 21:36; I Reg., 22: "Vigilate itaque omni tempore orantes, ut digni habeamini fugere omnia mala, que ventura sunt, et stare ante Filium hominis."

him to believe that a kindness done to his Minors in this *last hour* brought to men the blessings which Christ had promised the friends of his *least ones*. The textual difficulty encountered in identifying the *least* with the *Friars Minor* was slight discouragement to a man who hailed the *poor Christ* as the hero of the Bible and Christ's *poor men* as the continuing ambassadors of Jesus. "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." So Francis is purported to have spoken.⁷⁶ It is quite likely that he regarded these words as having applicability to all other spiritual poor men in addition to his friars. It is just as likely that he saw in his poor brethren a group in Christ's church specially called, through Divine Scriptures, for peculiarly divine ends.⁷⁷ The special method and measure of the Friars' uniqueness was none other than poverty. It was this secret above all which the Holy Word imparted to Francis.

The Bible warned that the present was the time of salvation.⁷⁸ Francis regarded it as his duty to proclaim, on God's behalf and for himself, that now was the time to be saved; that in the time to follow there would be judgment and reckoning.⁷⁹ It is significant to note that, in this single pas-

⁷⁶ The Vulgate (Matt. 25:40) reads: "Amen dico vobis, quamdiu fecistis uni ex his fratribus meis minimis, mihi fecistis." According to II Cel., 71, Francis' reference to this passage was as follows: "Nonnumquam suos ad petendam eleemosynam hortans, his *utebatur verbis*: 'Ite,' inquit, 'Quoniam hac *novissima hora* fratres Minores *commodati sunt* mundo, ut *electi* in eis compleant unde a Iudice commendentur: Quod *uni fecistis ex fratribus meis minoribus, mihi fecistis.*'" Leg. ant., 98b, gives this account: "Unde dicebat B. F. quod 'ideo voluit Dominus ut vocarentur fratres Minores, quia iste est populus quem Filius Dei suo patri postulavit; ipsemet Dei Filius de ipsis dicit in Evangelio: *Nolite timere pusillus grex, quia placuit Patri vestro dare vobis regnum*, et iterum: *Quod uni ex hiis minoribus fratribus meis fecistis, mihi fecistis.*'" Cf. Spec. Perf., XXVI. Did the text which Francis used read "minoribus" and not "minimis"? See D'Oisy, *op cit.*, XXXIX (1927), 655.

⁷⁷ Leg. ant., 98b: "Quoniam licet de omnibus pauperibus spiritualibus intelligatur Dominus hoc dixisse, precipue tamen predixit religionem fratrum Minorum esse venturam in Ecclesia sua."

⁷⁸ The Vulg., II Cor. 6:2: "Ecce nunc tempus acceptabile, ecce nunc dies salutis."

⁷⁹ To a woman spiritually hindered by her sinful husband, Francis

sage referred to, Francis discerned what he believed to be both the schedule of divine events and the peculiar responsibility which that cosmic process entailed for him. He humbly believed that his service of poverty was the means of bringing misguided humanity into accord with the designs of heaven. He was privileged to read the divine future through the Bible past. He could thus help to make men ready in the last times for what God's future should demand of them in the new day. His brethren had been sent abroad to proclaim by their words and deeds the will of omnipotent God.⁸⁰ With poverty like that of Christ they must deliver his call to repentance. The Bible was the charter of their poor life and the manual of human salvation. With it they prepared themselves and helped others to make ready for the coming kingdom.

is reported to have said (II Cel., 38): "Dices ei ex parte Dei et mea, quod nunc est *tempus salutis*, postmodum aequitatis." This accords perfectly with his conviction that God's word spoke especially to the Friars so that they might give special witness to the Lord's word. Cf. II Reg., 9.

⁸⁰ Epist. ad cap. gen., Introd.; Tob. 13-14.

CHAPTER V

THE LAST TIMES AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

THE EXPECTATION of approaching world's end and final judgment was a prominent article of medieval belief. Every man faced judgment of his individual soul at death. He knew that he must stand with all men before the bar of God at the resurrection. Like the generations before him, he reflected that his might be the day when the world would end. Christ would then return in glory to sit in judgment upon living and risen humanity. No one could foretell the dreaded hour. Christ himself had said, "Watch ye therefore, because ye know not what hour your Lord will come" (Matt. 24:42). No period or group stood out because of such a belief. It was in the spiritual atmosphere at all times. Latent though the expectation might become, it was summoned into active expression on innumerable occasions of human tension and social upheaval. Peasant and scholar agreed that the existing order and its injustices must cease. Unbalanced accounts must be reckoned with finality and a new era of righteousness begun.

In the course of the centuries a few basic considerations had emerged with regard to final things. It was commonly held that before the close of history there must be a call to universal repentance, a Christian apostolate to all nations. The Jews would at last be converted to the true faith. Elias and Enoch would return to preach, die at the hands of Antichrist, and rise to new life. A great apostasy led by false Christs would be followed by an appearance of Antichrist in his true character. Grievous persecutions of the Lord's faithful would finally cease. Antichrist and his bloody reign would be destroyed. Signs of the approaching end might be

discerned in distortions of nature. Suddenly, the world would be engulfed in a final conflagration and purified thereby for such renovation as God should decree. In the world's end and at the sound of a trumpet the general resurrection would take place. The Son of Man would appear in the heavens and sit at last as a king in implacable judgment upon all men of all times. A few of his chosen might assist him in the carrying out of his judicial will. The wicked would be dispatched to unending torment and the good to undying fellowship in the company of God and his angels in the heavenly realm. A new heaven and a new earth would glorify God and delight those with him, forevermore. Renewed man in a renewed world would attain the beatific vision in association with God eternally.

The details and exact order of the last things were hidden from all men. But the general outline of final events was clearly pictured in the writings of scholars and in the windows and statuary of church edifices. It was celebrated in sacred poems and awesome liturgy. The scene was burned unforgettably into the consciousness of humble people. Signs in plenty, however confused, elicited popular forebodings that last days might indeed be near. Holy crusades against the infidel were in progress. Strange prophets clamored for attention. False teachers and schismatics sought to lead the faithful astray. Eloquent popes and fiery preachers warned of Antichrist's approach and called upon true Christians to withstand him in the evening of the world's history. Charity receded. Unnatural vices and bloody strife were dominant in conduct and prevalent in literature. The aging world leaned heavily on a few humble mendicants, while bishops and princes quarreled over possessions and the piety of once holy men died away. True prophets of God thundered against the corruptions which invited imminent judgment as they listened for the last trump and scanned the heavens for signs of Christ's coming. As usual, the church taught the symbols

of the faith, and average men went on their normal ways in uneasy, but not paralyzing dread. They had little need to be reminded of things which they all believed. In moments of crisis they brooded over the fate which awaited them. On most occasions they relaxed into lethargic acceptance of things which were imminent, but not yet actual.¹

Francis shared in these beliefs and reactions of his times.² The end of the world was coming. It might be late or soon. He did not know and had no desire to speculate on the matter. Jesus himself had refrained from doing that. He followed Christ's teachings rather than the vain imaginings of self-styled prophets.³ He was sure that the dread event

¹ For the scriptural basis of the prevailing eschatology see esp. Matt. 24 and 25. Representative discussions of last things as summarized by authors before, during, and after Francis' times are to be found in Guibert de Nogent († ca. 1124), *Gesta Dei Per Francos*, Lib. II, MPL, CLVI, 700-701; Honorius of Autun († ca. 1125), *Elucidarium*, Lib. III, MPL, CLXXII, 1158-1176; Otto of Freising († 1158), *The Two Cities: A Chronicle of Universal History to the Year 1146 A. D.*, tr. C. C. Mierow (New York, 1928), Bk. VIII; Innocent III († 1216), *De Contemptu Mundi*, Lib. II-III, MPL, CCXVII, 734-746; Vincent de Beauvais († ca. 1264), *Speculum Historiale* [Epilogus], (Douai, 1624), col. 1323 ff.; Thomas Aquinas († 1274), *The Summa Theologica*, a translation of the Dominican Fathers (New York, 1921-22), Part III, Supplement [by Reginald of Piperno?]. Useful historical and theological treatises are those of E. Wadstein, *Die eschatologische Ideengruppe: Antichrist, Weltsabbat, Weltende und Weltgericht* (Leipzig, 1896); P. Althaus, *Die letzten Dinge: Entwurf einer Christlichen Eschatologie* (Gütersloh, 1926); J. Pohle, *Eschatology or the Catholic Doctrine of the Last Things: A Dogmatic Treatise*, English version by A. Preuss (St. Louis, 1917); J. A. MacCulloch, *Medieval Faith and Fable* (Boston, 1932), chap. xvii. The relation of eschatology to medieval art and literature is illuminatingly treated in E. Mâle, *L'art religieux du XIII^e siècle en France: étude sur l'iconographie du moyen âge et sur ses sources d'inspiration* (4th ed.; Paris, 1919); L'Bréhier, *L'art chrétien: son développement iconographique des origines à nos jours* (Paris, 1928); and in R. De Gourmont, *Le Latin mystique: les poètes de l'antiphonaire et la symbolique au moyen âge* (Paris, 1892).

² I Reg., 23, 16. Consult A. Dempf, *Sacrum Imperium: Geschichts- und Staatsphilosophie des Mittelalters und der politischen Renaissance* (München, 1929), p. 301. See also R. C. Petry, "Medieval Eschatology and St. Francis of Assisi," *Church History*, IX (1940), 54-69.

³ Francis made numerous references, direct and indirect, to such passages as Matthew 10, 16:24-28, 19:28, 24, 25, 28:20, Mark 13, Luke 9, 10, 12:8-9, 21:24-36, 22. He accepted them unquestioningly as Christ's

would be terrifying and sudden. Christ had clearly said so.⁴ Tribulations would indeed precede it, and Christ's followers would not escape them.⁵ The time was all too short in which to preach men's need of repentance. They must be shaken from their sinful indifference before death and the last day hurried them to their eternal doom. Only those who repented and walked in the narrow way until the consummation of the age could be saved.⁶ Elias and Enoch, together with all saints and heavenly powers, were solicited for aid in the loving praise of the true and everliving God. Every Christian was implored to avoid that apostasy which led to destruction and exhorted to persevere in penitence and true Catholic faith, without which there was no salvation.⁷ The Evil One was abroad and must be fought with the full support of God, Christ, and all his saints. Christ was surely coming. He would judge all impartially. He would not hesitate to send the wicked into eternal fire or fail to gather the righteous into his kingdom with the Father.⁸

There was nothing distinctive about these beliefs. That which distinguished Francis from others was the zeal with which he accepted his special responsibility in the last times. He believed that he had been called to follow Christ's poverty so that he might be free to herald more effectively his coming kingdom. Francis had no thought of ushering in a new age. That was the prerogative of God and his Son. He did believe that his was a special commission in the latter days to help prepare sinners for Christ's new world. Like an earlier announcer of the Lord's coming, he would proclaim Christ's advent.⁹ This might be near or faraway. But Christ

word concerning his own vocation and the last days. See their use in I Reg.

⁴ I Reg., 9; Epist. ad fideles, 11; Luke 21:34-35; cf. Matt. 24:42.

⁵ I Reg., 16, 17, 22; Verb. Admon., 6; II Reg., 10; I Cel., 29.

⁶ Epist. ad fideles, 11, 12; I Reg., 16, 21; Ad Universos Custodes.

⁷ I Reg., 23, 21; Epist. ad fideles, 12, 11.

⁸ I Reg., 23; Epist. ad fideles, 9; cf. Matt. 25:31-34.

⁹ On the vital orthodoxy of Francis' eschatological views and for his

had laid upon him the special responsibility of inaugurating a renunciatory association which should be perpetuated until the final day. It was to that end that Francis had received his call to surrender self, family, goods, and all the world. For this cause he was to preach penitence, peace, and the coming heavenly realm.¹⁰

Soon after Francis' conversion a band of robbers had seized him and demanded who he might be. According to legend, he replied unhesitatingly, "I am a Herald of the Great King."¹¹ Throughout his life and with undaunted courage before his death, he asserted his direct commission from Christ himself. He had been specifically chosen to be the Master's poor preacher of repentance to an imperiled world.¹² Christ had other messengers, also. But Francis alone had been given perfect freedom to serve men as the Lord had served them. So long as he followed unconditionally the poverty of the Master he might utter authoritatively the Lord's words of salvation.¹³

Celano doubtless expressed Francis' own humble conviction when he asserted, "This man was sent by God in order that after the apostles' example he might bear witness to the truth throughout the whole world. . . . For in this latest time this new evangelist, like one of the rivers of Paradise, diffused the streams of the Gospel over the earth. . . ."¹⁴ His message had the urgency of crisis; his responsibility was that of challenging sinners to repentance; the area of his service

belief in himself as another Baptist, the Vorläufer of Christ's new kingdom, see E. Benz, *Ecclesia Spiritualis: Kirchenidee und Geschichtstheologie der Franziskanischen Reformation* (Stuttgart, 1934), pp. 164, 167-168. The significant deviation of Francis' eschatology from that of extreme Joachimism and other stigmatized movements is treated by Sessevalle, *op. cit.*, I, 66-70; Dempf, *op. cit.*, pp. 269, 283-284; Benz, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47.

¹⁰ I Cel., 29; I Reg., Introd., 1, 2.

¹¹ I Cel., 16; Bon., II, 5.

¹² Test., 4, 6-8, 12-13.

¹³ Angelo Clareno, *Historia Septem Tribulationum*, in J. von Döllinger, *Beiträge zur Sektengeschichte des Mittelalters* (2 vols.; Munich, 1890), II, 420-421.

¹⁴ I Cel., 89: "... in novissimo tempore"

was the whole world; the pathway of his heraldry was Christ's own poverty.

Francis realized that if he had been uniquely called, it had not been for his own fame. Instead, God had chosen one completely surrendered to the divine will that men might see in greater clarity the heavenly glory. Poverty fitted him as God's prophet to utter the divine oracle. The passionate kingdom-message which he preached marked him for his hearers as "a man from another world."¹⁵

If Francis' own calling was sure, the distinctive apostolate of his brethren in the last times was no less certain. They were sent to the whole world to give witness, by their words and deeds, to the Heavenly Word of the one Almighty God. They were a group especially chosen to follow the way of perfection in the proclamation of the divine message. Christ himself had prepared them for their vocation in these last times. Francis had sent them out with the Lord's command to minister, two by two, unto those who would repent and be saved.¹⁶

No legendary emphasis is truer to Francis' spirit than that which records his belief in the Friars' special destiny.¹⁷ Francis is represented as describing their religion and life as that of "a certain little flock" which the Son of God besought of his Father in the last age. Said the Son, "Father, I would that Thou shouldst make and give to Me a new and humble folk in these last times, unlike to all others who have gone before them, in humility and poverty, and content to possess Me alone." To this plea the Father gave ready assent. To

¹⁵ Cf. *Actus*, X, 5-9; *Expos. Reg.*, Cap. X, Oliger, ed., pp. 208-209; *Spec. Perf.*, LXXII; *Verb. Admon.*, 28; *Bon.*, X, 4; *Tres Soc.*, 54: "... hominem alterius saeculi."

¹⁶ I *Reg.*, 11, 22; *Test.*, 4; I *Cel.*, 29; *Spec. Perf.*, LI; see Sabatier, *Le Speculum Perfectionis*, I (1928), 72 and nn. for the prevalent use of such terms as "in hoc novissimo tempore" and "in hac novissima hora" in the thirteenth century.

¹⁷ Cf. *Spec. Perf.*, XXVI; *Leg. ant.*, 98b; Dempf, *op. cit.*, pp. 290-302; I *Reg.*, 23.

his later disciples, as to the first ones, there came the words, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Unto the world, and with regard to the Friars also, he proclaimed, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."¹⁸

To be sure Francis knew that these words had general application to all spiritual poor men. But he was convinced that the Lord spoke them "more especially of the Order of Friars Minor, which was to be in His Church." For "the least of these" of whom Christ spoke were, in a peculiar sense, Francis and his Minor Brethren. One need not search out in these impressionistic accounts some hidden influence traceable to the propaganda of the fourteenth-century Franciscan Spirituals. Some of Francis' teachings on poverty may, in time, have been distorted by followers of a chiliastic stamp. But the conviction that he was the divinely called leader of a little band in the last times was truly Francis' own. To modern skeptics of such an eschatological view Francis might well have retorted in the words of the *Mirror of Perfection*, "For it is no great thing if the Lord should wish to have a new and little flock, singular and unlike all those who have come before them in life and work. . . ." The whole joyous burden of Francis' calling was just this dedication of a renounced few to the salvation of others before the last day. Christ had summoned them, and the church had given them its approval and protection that they might go their special gospel way.¹⁹

¹⁸ Spec. Perf., XXVI: "Religio et vita fratrum Minorum est quidam pusillus grex quem filius Dei in hac novissima hora postulavit patri suo caelesti dicens: 'Pater, vellem quod faceres et dares mihi unum novum et humilem populum in hac novissima hora, qui esset dissimilis in humilitate et paupertate ab omnibus aliis qui praecesserunt, et esset contentus habere me solum.'" The language of Leg. ant. 98b, probably a more ancient source, is almost identical with that cited above.

¹⁹ Francis' own interpretation of poverty, and not the involved history of the later Spirituals, is the subject of discussion in this book. A brief résumé of the Order's later history is given in Chapter IX. See K. Bal-

Now, as before, Christ had committed to a humble band of twelve the good news of deliverance for the captives of sin and the invitation to the kingdom of those saved from impending calamity.²⁰ Francis had a special love for his "household of a peculiar faith united by the fellowship of an eternal inheritance."²¹ Like Christ they chose poverty; like Him they were sent to the world for the sake of sinners, but they were not made one with it and its temporal involvements.²²

The Saint expected no large group to accept the divine rigidities of the poverty life. He viewed this dedication, not as the desirable status of all men, but as the hard-won opportunity of a *little flock* called to the service of humanity as a whole.²³ Poverty opened to the few the path which led to service for the many. The burden of his message to the world, therefore, was not the necessity of poverty absolutism for all, but the divine evangel of redeeming love. The constant call of his brethren to poverty was a plea for the fullest surrender of themselves to their world mission.²⁴

thasar, *Geschichte des Armutsstreites im Franziskanerorden bis zum Konzil von Vienne* (Münster (Westf.), 1911); Gratien, *Histoire*, pp. 63-513, and other literature cited in Chapter IX. Cumulative evidence that the emphasis of Spec. Perf., XXVI, and of the earlier Leg. ant., 98b, was that of Francis himself is found in I Reg., 22, 23, 1, 2, 9, 14, 16, 17, 21; II Reg., 6, 2, 9; Test., 4, 11, 13; Epist. ad cap. gen., Intro.; Epist. ad fideles, 1. See Sabatier, *Études*, pp. 236-237. Bonaventura, who was by no means a Zealot, frankly asserted his firm belief in Francis' eschatological destiny (Bon., Prologue; VII, 8; cf. De Conform., *Anal. Fran.*, IV, 76-78). His work, unlike the Spec. Perf., was not stigmatized as neo-Joachimite even though he went so far as to speak of Francis under the similitude of the angel of the sixth seal (Apoc., VII, 2). As noted before, there was nothing heterodox about Francis' eschatology. See Benz, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

²⁰ II Cel., 156; Sabatier, *Études*, pp. 240-241; Luke 4:18.

²¹ II Cel., 172.

²² II Reg., 6; Bon., VII, 1-3; II Cel., 200; I Reg., 22.

²³ II Cel., 200: "Paupertatem nover(i)ti)s, fili(i), specialem viam salutis, cuius est fructus multiplex et paucis notissimus."

²⁴ Scudder, *op. cit.*, p. 60, writes: "... the apostolic life in its fullness was only for the few, the special intimates of Jesus, called to follow to its farthest limit the 'via di perfezione.'" Cf. P. Cuthbert, "La Signifi-

Poverty was indispensable to their unique service. It was difficult of observance for the many.²⁵ Francis favored, therefore, the limitation of his little band to the few who would go the whole gospel way. He seems to have sensed the inevitable coming to his group of more numbers than the qualitative standard of their life would warrant. He predicted the selective process which would come to work among them, reducing them to the necessary limits of a consecrated *little flock*.²⁶

Francis never tired of calling the Friars' notice to the distinctive function which set them apart. They had been asked to make themselves poor, not to command flattering attention, but to consecrate themselves more fully to the preaching of repentance.²⁷ It was observed by contemporary critics that while great prelates let sinners die unevangelized, these poor men supported the divine wish "to save many souls before the end of the world."²⁸ They were new champions of church and religion against the imminent inroads of the son of perdition, of Antichrist himself. They were the hope of men in the eventide of a world whose sun was fast setting.²⁹ Francis was quick to declare that no one could be "a friend of Christ unless he loved the souls that Christ loved."³⁰ His poor men had "been given to the world for salvation." The first journey on which Francis dispatched them was undertaken in gospel poverty for the preaching of

cation de la Pauvreté Franciscaine," *Études Franciscaines*, XXXVIII (1926), 487.

²⁵ Spec. Perf., X: ". . . et propterea volebat ut fratres non in magna quantitate in locis collocarentur, quia sibi difficile videbatur in magna multitudine paupertatem observari." ²⁶ I Cel., 27-28.

²⁷ I Cel., 29, 22; I Reg., 14, 21.

²⁸ Cf. Jacobi de Vitriaco, in G. Golubovich, *Biblioteca Bio-Bibliografica della Terra Santa e dell' Oriente Francese* (Quaracchi, 1906), I, 5-6: "Credo autem, quod in opprobrium praelatorum, qui quasi canes sunt muti non valentes latrare, Dominus per huiusmodi simplices et pauperes homines multas animas ante finem mundi vult salvare."

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-10 (*Hist. orientalis*, lib. 2, cap. 32).

³⁰ II Cel., 172.

peace, penitence, and the remission of sins. He was sure that the world would gladly relieve the necessity of men who surrendered all for its redemption. The brethren offered to genuine penitents not only a greater enjoyment of the present life, but also a happy portion in the kingdom of heaven.³¹ But to claim a dowry not of this world, the wicked must change their whole order of existence. They must be led to confess their sins; produce fruits worthy of repentance; forgive as they would be forgiven; and "Beware, abstain from all evil and persevere in good until the end."³² Those continuing to serve the world, the flesh, and the Devil would hear their awful doom at death. At God's last tribunal they would be consigned to eternal torment, while the repentant would be joined to Christ's everlasting society. It was the Friars' challenging task to swell the number of the saved. They had to make men secure against surprise on the final day. Woe unto them if they failed to confess Christ and to lead others to confess him before the end. At the judgment he would deny membership in the kingdom to them and to those intrusted to their care.³³

The Minors had a definite message. It was imperative that they deliver it clearly and forcefully. The preaching upon which the souls of so many would depend must be Catholic in doctrine, simple in language, and exacting in its demands for unconditional repentance.³⁴ Their lives and their words must proclaim penitence, peace, and reconciliation throughout Christian lands and to the infidel beyond.³⁵ Christ, who had overcome the world, had made of them his mouthpiece of warning and promise. God's ultimatum of repentance in the present or eternal damnation later must be delivered before the trumpet sounded and the books of the Judge were opened.³⁶ Francis' poor men were minstrels of

³¹ II Cel., 70.

³² I Reg., 21.

³³ I Reg., 16, 21, 23; Epist. ad fideles, 11, 12.

³⁴ II Reg., 9, 16, 17; De Conform., *Anal. Fran.*, IV, 420; I Cel., 36.

³⁵ Leg. ant., 103d; Spec. Perf., LXV.

³⁶ Tres Soc., 26, 36, 33.

the Lord, destined to make glad the hearts of the penitent. They were preachers of doom for the unrepentant.³⁷

In a real sense all the preaching of Francis and his friars had reference to the day when Christ should divide mankind into two groups: one on his right hand, and the other on his left. Their hearers knew well enough the inevitable consequences of failure to repent.³⁸ That famous chant, "The Day of Wrath," became current in the later thirteenth century. Its sentiments had brought fear of damnation and hope of ultimate justice to the hearts of men for unnumbered generations.³⁹ Francis was powerfully affected by thoughts of the last judgment.⁴⁰ It gave direction to his purpose and to that of the Friars who followed him. He, too, looked expectantly for that day when the world would be destroyed in flames, and Christ the Judge would seat himself at his tribunal. Nothing could then remain hidden; no injustice would continue unavenged.⁴¹ In confident tone he declared his faith in ultimate right at the Judge's hand for the wicked and for the good. Swift, terrible consequence would at last overtake those unrepentant, voluntary aliens from Christ's love. He expressed his conviction in most unequivocal terms: "We give thanks to Thee because Thy Son Himself will come in the glory of His Majesty to drive away into eternal fire the cursed who have not repented, and have not known Thee. . . ."⁴² He had equal confidence in the beatitude of "those who have known, adored, and served thee with a con-

³⁷ Spec. Perf., C; I Reg., 16.

³⁸ Wadstein, *op. cit.*, p. 195, notes the powerful hold of the Judgment upon the inner folk-consciousness.

³⁹ Père Charles Cahier in private correspondence once wrote of the "Dies Irae": "A mon avis, ce chant flottait pour ainsi dire dans l'atmosphère chrétienne avant de se condenser sous sa forme actuelle" (quoted by P. Charles Clair, *Le Dies Irae: Histoire, Traduction, Commentaire*, Paris, 1881, p. 14).

⁴⁰ Sabatier, *Études*, pp. 288-289.

⁴¹ R. De Gourmont, *op. cit.*, p. 304, observes: "Le Jugement dernier et l'enfer, sa conséquence pour les mauvais, c'était le souci et aussi la consolation du moyen âge; c'était le recours suprême contre les injustices et les tribulations de la vie"

⁴² I Reg., 23.

trite heart." To them would come the words: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."⁴³

Thus in stark, apocalyptic language, did Francis depict the coming of Christ in judicial grandeur. The majestic one would toll the knell of earthly temporalities and welcome into their cosmic dominion the heirs of the Eternal. The elements of judgment, damnation, cosmic purpose, and destiny were thus placed in a setting of last times and new days. Here was signalized the blessed future of Christ's redeemed. In their company were the Minors and the men whom Francis in poverty had helped to save.

Francis quoted more than once from Matthew 25:31-34 and 19:28. In so doing he revealed his preoccupation with the very eschatological passages and with the most imaginative reconstruction of the Great Assize which found their way into church window, medieval hymn, and everyday mind. He had doubtless pondered the inevitable coming of the Christ-Judge, not only in the pages of Holy Writ, but also in the inescapable iconography of the Church. He had perused that Bible which was the people's own.⁴⁴ Together they looked for the signs of Christ's appearing.

Persecution for Christ's faithful would surely precede his second coming. The Friars must be patient in tribulation and exultant in the face of the testing which would preface their sure reward. Their own calm courage would help to sustain the faithful in the terrors of the last days. None need fear those destroying the body. All present sufferings, patiently borne, would bring those undergoing them the great Judge's commendation. The Friars, who renounced all, would thus claim their portion in the eternal kingdom and bring others to share it.⁴⁵

⁴³ I Reg., 23, 21.

⁴⁴ For a lucid discussion of the Christ in judgment as seen in window and tympanum, see Bréhier, *op. cit.*, pp. 290 f.; Mâle, *op. cit.*

⁴⁵ I Reg., 9; Matt. 19:29; I Reg., 1, 16; I Cel., 29.

In his selection of materials for the Office of the Passion, Francis gives poetic emphasis to the coming of the Christ-Judge. None need hope in vain whose confidence is in Him, who shall come to judge with justice. Let all glorify the name, follow the precepts, and bear the Cross of the Christ now seated at the right hand of God. From thence he will come in righteous judgment of all the earth.⁴⁶

The Lord, who was to occupy the throne of justice, had promised his first Disciples that they should sit on twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel. The Friars were true disciples also. They, too, would have their share in judicial glory.⁴⁷

Men thus destined for such high honors had all the more reason to practice vigilance. Their lives must be purged of every worldly concern if they would stand worthily at last before the Son of Man.⁴⁸ No carelessness in their fraternal ministry and world apostolate would be condoned. They must foster alertness by reading or having read to them the life-giving words of the Lord. Those failing to do so must "render an account in the day of judgment before the tribunal of Christ."⁴⁹ Such precautions were the only real guarantee that the Minor Brethren would continue as the Lord's chosen until the day of reckoning.⁵⁰

But Francis looked beyond the judgment scene to the kingdom which awaited the saved. In preaching repentance, world's end, and final sentence, the Friars were helping to prepare humanity for a place in its supernal beatitude.⁵¹ The Minors lived in poverty that they might claim a unique heritage and enable others to have a portion in the supernatural

⁴⁶ *Opuscula*, pp. 135-136, 143.

⁴⁷ Matt. 19:28.

⁴⁸ I Reg., 4, 5; I Reg., 22: "Vigilate itaque omni tempore orantes, ut digni habeamini fugere omnia mala, que ventura sunt, et stare ante Filium hominis." Cf. Luke 21:36.

⁴⁹ Epist. ad fideles, 12.

⁵⁰ Spec. Perf., LXXIX: ". . . quod religio et professio fratrum Minorum non deficiet usque ad diem iudicii." Cf. De Conform., *Anal. Fran.*, IV, 435-436.

⁵¹ I Reg., 14, 16.

realm.⁵² Christ had once said, "Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven." The Friars Minor, who were legitimate sons of the Great King by the humble Dame Poverty, had first right to that legacy.⁵³ The surest way to establish proof that they were the King's children was to render humble service "to every human creature for God's sake." To enter the kingdom they must bring others with them.⁵⁴ No vigilance in renunciation was too great a sacrifice to make for their own heavenly riches and the eternal happiness of others.⁵⁵

For, of course, the Friars' true citizenship was in the kingdom yet to be. Their status in the existing world was necessarily one of pilgrimage and exile. In this manner only could they enjoy deliverance from the fleeting present and attachment to the abiding future. That legend did no violence to Francis which represented him as ascribing to a failure in poverty the inundation of certain friars by the flood of the world. True friars, contemptuous of all worldly affairs, would pass without danger from the temporal to the eternal.⁵⁶ They could claim the coming kingdom because they were not

⁵² A profusion of evidence is found in I Reg., 1, 2, 8, 14; II Reg. 2, 6, 10; Test., 4, 7, 11, 13; II Cel., 72, 55, 208; Spec. Perf., XXII, C; Leg. ant., 92; Actus, XIII; Tres Soc., 35, 54.

⁵³ Luke 6:20; Matt. 5:3. See Sabatier, *Le Speculum Perfectionis*, I (1928), 59-60. For the parable of Dame Poverty and her sons see Bernardus de Bessa, *Liber De Laudibus B. Fr.*, *Anal. Fran.*, III, 674-675; Tres Soc., 12; Bon.; III, 10.

⁵⁴ Epist. ad fideles, 9.

⁵⁵ I Reg., 8: "Caveamus ergo nos, qui omnia reliquimus, ne pro tam modico regnum celorum perdamus." Cf. Tres Soc., 35. Brother Giles phrased the matter thus: "Woe to that man who placeth his heart and desire and his strength in earthly things, on account of which he abandoneth and loseth heavenly and eternal good . . . the body was made for the sake of the soul and this world for the sake of the other world" (P. Robinson, *The Golden Sayings of Brother Giles of Assisi*, Philadelphia, 1907, pp. 27, 29). Cf. Bon., VII, 7; II Cel., 72, quotes Francis as saying: "Pro feudo ad horam concesso hereditatem stabilem se relinquere nolle. 'Paupertas,' inquit, 'est quae haeredes et reges regni caelorum instituit, non falsae vestrae divitiae.'"

⁵⁶ Vita Leonis, *Chronica XXIV Generalium Ordinis Minorum*, *Anal. Fran.*, III, 69: ". . . veri autem fratres Minores omnia mundana contemnentes sine periculo de temporalibus transeunt ad aeterna."

fettered by the existing order. "The followers of most holy poverty, having nothing, loved nothing, and therefore had no fear of losing anything."⁵⁷ Their only property was the eternal heritage of owning no transitory possessions.⁵⁸ Let them not mourn the absence of garments in this world that they might possess immortal vestments in the heavenly kingdom.⁵⁹

Like their Master, the Minors were in the world, but not of it. They were not to be removed from it until their saving mission was complete and the coming kingdom proclaimed to all who would hearken. In the meantime, however, they were commended by Christ to the Father, who could keep them from the evils of the present age.

Francis looked to God's kingdom as to a power already working in the Friars' lives and impelling them to an exercise, in their own day, of the ultimate ideals of the future. But he looked even more expectantly to the coming of that final realm which would completely transcend the present.⁶⁰ He addressed himself in the paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer to the Heavenly Father and his coming kingdom.⁶¹ "Thy kingdom come," prays Francis, "that Thou mayst reign in us by grace and mayst make us come to Thy Kingdom, where there is the clear vision of Thee, the perfect love of Thee, the blessed company of Thee, the eternal enjoyment of

⁵⁷ I Cel., 39: "Paupertatis sanctissimae sectatores," quia nihil habebant, nihil amabant: nihil proinde perdere verebantur."

⁵⁸ Hugo de Dina, *De Finibus Paupertatis*, AFH, V (1912), 290: ". . . hoc solum habet proprium, quod nil in hiis, que transeunt, possunt habere proprium: nichil enim eis magis improprium, quam proprium, et nichil magis proprium, quam hoc ipsum, quod nichil est, possideant, in proprium a modo et usque in sempiternum. Amen."

⁵⁹ I Reg., 2: ". . . ut possint habere vestimenta immortalitatis et glorie in regno celorum."

⁶⁰ I Reg., 23; Benz, *op. cit.*, pp. 162 ff.

⁶¹ Though placed by Boehmer among the doubtful writings, this *Expositio beati patris super orationem Dominicam*, is in full accord with the spirit and tenor of Francis' utterances. Cf. I Reg., 23. Sabatier joined with the editors of the *Opuscula* in holding it genuine. See Robinson, *Writings*, p. 138 and nn.

Thee.”⁶² The Poverello here does obeisance to the double sovereignty of God.⁶³ One reign is by grace in the visible world. God comes into the life of man through the function of Christ as mediated by the saving, sacramental church. The other kingdom is the realm perfect and transcendent, the “wholly other.” “Make us come to Thy Kingdom,” implores Francis. Man is here elevated through divine initiative and saving power to the blessed society of God in the heavenly world. These new times of the future age shall follow the last times in the present one. The one is visible within the framework of the existing world. The other is supernatural and within the cosmic frame of reference. Yet the two orders of life and the two kingdoms are in a divine continuity. They are not eternally separated but are rather joined in the person and function of Christ. It is, for Francis, therefore, one kingdom under two forms. The one kingdom extends itself out of the present aeon into that of the future, where it is fully revised and perfected. The one Christ, who is concealed here under the sacrament and revealed there in his sovereignty as he is, holds both kingdoms together.

Francis prepares his friars for participation in both kingdoms, or rather for life in both phases of one kingdom. It is Christ who vitalizes the kingdom of grace in the present world. Francis and his brethren give themselves unreservedly to the church and its cult, which alone make Christ’s presence real in the current order of life. It is Christ who will bring in the kingdom of the “wholly other.” Francis and his Minors, while serving the present kingdom in obedience to Christ’s church, are announcers of that world to be.

There was in Francis no unbalanced devotion to the future kingdom at the expense of the present one. It was the trans-

⁶² Robinson (tr.), *Writings*, pp. 86-88; cf. *Opuscula*, p. 120: “*Adveniat regnum tuum: ut tu regnes in nobis per gratiam et facias nos venire ad regnum tuum. . .*”

⁶³ See Benz, *op. cit.*, pp. 163-164, on this point, and for an excellent treatment of the two kingdoms.

cent kingdom in which the redeemed would associate with the Father in the fullness of his being. That must be the *summum bonum* of all existence. Man must enter that realm by God-inaugurated means, not by natural evolution. Humankind could not take it by force. However, for Francis, as for Jesus, the absolute ideals of the transcendent, other world laid their demands upon the present. Francis' prayer that God's will might be done on earth had to be answered in part by the Friars' active love for God's children of the present order. Their social present felt the transforming power of men dedicated beyond all time to the lasting society of God and the redeemed. But what they did for their world did not determine God's kingdom. Its demands upon them determined the manner in which they should bless their age.

Poverty and the kingdom were linked from first to last in the thinking of St. Francis. His call had enjoined the practice of renunciation and the preaching of God's rule. Poverty had been the voluntarily chosen way of Him who would bring in the new day. It was the special means which his unique followers were to employ in announcing his reign. Deprivation was their heritage; they found in it new freedom from the attachments of earth; theirs was a pilgrimage to a more enduring society. The transcendent realm was the end product of their poor life; its coming under Christ was the goal toward which poverty was directed. They adopted the poverty way of the Christ because it led to the kingdom for them and thus for humanity, whom they served in complete self-abnegation. They believed in the end of the world which was drawing ever nearer. They were preachers of repentance who were making men ready for that event. Their sacrificial ministry proclaimed the way of salvation for those who should be judged alone at death and together in the final hearing. While they edified their hearers in the last age, they led the way to the everlasting society of the new world.

CHAPTER VI

THE CHURCH AND CATHOLICISM

FRANCIS' POVERTY had been founded upon Christ's Gospel. The life of renunciation continued to derive its vitality from the Bible. The historic church had, likewise, been built around and upon the Divine Word. Jesus had left his commission to Peter in the words: "Thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."¹ The church had clearly been instituted to serve the same Christ and the same Gospel which Francis served.

It was the church in its liturgy which had transmitted to Francis the gospel call of poverty.² The servant church in the person of its highest servant, the Pope, had confirmed to Francis this gospel rule.³ The Mass of Holy Mother Church served to present both the gospel word of Jesus, which Francis so gladly heard, and the gospel life of Christ in the Eucharist, which he so ecstatically imbibed.⁴

So long as Francis remained true to the Gospel from which his call to poverty had come, he must remain true to the church which served that Gospel in word and sacrament. To the end of his life he expressed his loyalty to the church and its priesthood as to the servants, not the opponents, of his gospel renunciation.⁵ Every poor brother must be a true Catholic in word and deed. Anyone who sinned against Catholic faith and life and remained unrepentant in his sin forfeited, thereby, his membership in the poor fraternity.⁶

¹ Matt. 16:18.

² I Cel., 22.

³ Test., 4; I Reg., Introd.

⁴ Spec. Perf., CXVII; Test. 3; Epist. ad fideles, 6; *De reverentia corporis Domini et de munditia altaris*, in *Opuscula*, pp. 22-23.

⁵ Test., 2-9.

⁶ I Reg., 19.

No antipathy could exist between the Gospel of Christ and Christ's church. The unique function of the priestly institution was to celebrate the mysteries of that Gospel.⁷ Antagonism could not abide between the Friars, who were generated by the Gospel, and the church, by whom the literal gospel followers were to be protected. The Catholic fraternity of Minors obeyed the church in gospel poverty and humility.⁸

Francis was pre-eminently a Catholic individual. He loved the church in utter devotion. It was the servant of Christ's words, the guardian of priceless traditions, the incorporation of God's power, the supernatural projector of Christ's earthly and spiritual presence. It served as the link which bound the past, the present, and the coming kingdom of Christ. To follow Christ's way of gospel poverty Francis had, necessarily, to be a loyal son of Christ's servant, the church. His life was apostolic and Catholic.⁹ He wanted that of his friars to be the same.¹⁰ His spiritual Testament called

⁷ *Loc. cit.*; Test., 3.

⁸ II Reg., 12.

⁹ The Office hymn for the feast of St. Francis, according to Julien de Spire, as reproduced in Hilarin Felder, *Die liturgischen Reimofficien auf die Heiligen Franciscus und Antonius, gedichtet und componiert durch Fr. Julian von Speier* (ca. 1250) . . . (Freiburg (Schweiz), 1901), p. 107, reads:

Franciscus, vir catholicus
Et totus apostolicus,
Ecclesie teneri
Fidem romane docuit
Presbiterosque monuit
Pre cunctis revereri.

¹⁰ See Sabatier, *Vie* (1931), xxxviii. I Reg., 19: "Omnes fratres sint catholici, vivant et loquantur catholice." Cf. II Reg., 12. Julien de Spire says, Leg., Cap. V, 28: "Hoc enim ipse vir catholicus et totus apostolicus [cf. the expression: "Et unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam"] in predicatione sua principaliter monuit, ut Romane Ecclesie fides inviolabiliter servaretur, et ob dominici sacramenti, quod ministerio sacerdotum conficitur, dignitatem, in summa sacerdotalis ordo reverentia teneretur. Sed et divine legis doctores et omnes ecclesiasticos ordines docebat summopere reverendos." Cf. Cap. V, 27. Julien de Spire's *Vita S. Francisci* was edited by Fr. Van Ortrooy as "La légende de St. François . . . par Julien de Spire" (hereinafter referred to as Leg.), *Anal. Boll.*, XXI (1902), 148-202.

upon the brethren to "observe in a more Catholic way the rule . . . promised to the Lord."¹¹ He was aware of human shortcomings within the ecclesiastical organization. His loving obedience to it, however, permitted not the slightest derogation of it.¹² He confounded heresy, extolled the faith, and occasioned rejoicing for the faithful to the discomfiture of the heterodox.¹³ The Pope himself was the first to defend the Friars against charges of heresy. He declared them to be true Catholics and special sons of the Roman Church.¹⁴

The Minors were, in every way, men of their times, unquestioning in their devotion to churchly dogmas and mysteries. Reverence for holy relics, as for all other instrumentalities of the institutional church, may quite likely have been as unqualified as the legends suggest.¹⁵ Francis was prepared to dedicate himself and his brethren in fullest subservience to the Holy Mother. In serving her they rendered homage to the institution which in turn served Christ and his Gospel. In the truest sense, for Francis to render such service was both to exemplify the spirit of poverty and to advance that apostolic renunciation which the church had long delighted to honor.¹⁶ His catholicity was the guarantee and symbol of his unlimited poverty.

It was no accident that Francis' admonition to fasting and to avoidance of vices and self-indulgence was followed imme-

¹¹ Test., 11: ". . . ut regulam quam Domino promissimus, melius catholice observemus."

¹² F. Heiler, "Der heilige Franz von Assisi und die Katholische Kirche," in A. von Martin, *Franz von Assisi Sonderheft der Vierteljahrschrift Una Sancta* (Stuttgart, 1926), pp. 32-33.

¹³ Julien de Spire, Leg., X, 46: "Confundebatur heretica pravitas, fides extollebatur catholica. . . ." Cf. I Cel., 62: "Confundebatur haeretica pravitas, extollebatur fides Ecclesiae, et fidelibus iubilantibus, haeretici latitabant."

¹⁴ Chronica Fratris Iordani, No. 4, in *Anal. Fran.*, I, 3: "Qui eorum regulam authenticam, utpote a Sede firmatam, et fratres speciales filios Romanae Ecclesiae et vere catholicos suis litteris declaravit, et sic eos a suspitione haeresis liberavit."

¹⁵ Bon., VI, 7.

¹⁶ Heiler, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-44; cf. Angelo Clareno, *Hist. Sept. Trib.*, in Döllinger, *op. cit.*, I, 422-425.

diately by the reminder, "We must remain attached to the Catholic Church." In the same context he counseled frequent visits to churches and reverence for clerks, "not for themselves, if they are sinners, but because of their office and ministry of the most Holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which they sacrifice upon the altar and receive and distribute to others."¹⁷ Outside the church and its sacraments, which the clerks alone could administer, there was no salvation. Those who were called to world renunciation had a special responsibility and mission of their own, but they were not thereby released from their obedience as Catholics.¹⁸

The same Lord who had bestowed upon Francis the privileged mission of gospel poverty¹⁹ had granted to him faith in the true priests of Holy Roman Church by reason of their character.²⁰ It was not his will to expose their human frailties or to oppose them, sinful though they might be. He revered them rather as his lords, as the sons of God through whose sacramental functions alone the poor Christ became corporately present among his followers. He admonished all clerks to avoid the sin of negligence in administering the Body, Blood, sacred name, and written words of Christ. He required proper reverence for all ministers and theologians.²¹ God alone dared judge the servants of his mysteries. Any disrespect which was shown to them by others constituted a sin as great as the unique function which they performed.²²

The ultimate goal of Francis' special life of poverty was service for the Christ and the salvation of souls. Since the

¹⁷ Epist. ad fideles, 6.

¹⁸ *Loc. cit.*; Luke 11:42; I Reg., 19.

¹⁹ Test., 4.

²⁰ Test., 3: "Postea Dominus dedit michi et dat tantam fidem in sacerdotibus, qui vivunt secundum formam sancte ecclesie Romane propter ordinem ipsorum. . ."

²¹ De reverentia, *Opuscula*, p. 22; Epist. ad fideles, 6; Test., 3.

²² Verb. Admon., 26.

church and its priesthood were instituted for that same end, they must be supported, not opposed, by true poverty followers. He may well have said what is beautifully attributed to him, "We have been sent for the salvation of souls in aid of the clergy, that what is found wanting in them may be supplied by us."²³ The Friars needed to remember that such obedient co-operation was a veritable part of their special service of renunciation. They could hope to aid the clergy in their work of salvation through pacific relations only. If the clerks were unworthy of such support, they could be held answerable to God alone. A true poverty witness might well involve edification for the clergy and salvation for the people. The Friars' obligation as obedient sons of the church was to hold up the hands of her ministers, to "supply their manifold defects, and be the more humble."²⁴ Far from asking special favors from the church or from running counter to the will of her servants, Francis proposed to give obedient service to her. His special poverty was to be the means of greater loyalty to Christ's spouse. Through special service in her, he would fulfill his special mission for Christ to the universe.²⁵

Francis believed that the church was the product of the poor Christ's will. It was a part of that universal project in which the Friars had a distinctive function. As an historic institution it bound together all of God's plans for men of the past, present, and future. No special group or individual commissioned by the Divine could lie outside the one great institution through which He mediated His will to humanity. The unique service of the Minors was not instituted from without the church or in opposition to it. Their special call was issued in harmony with its life and action. The peculiar poverty life of the Friars was a division of labor within the

²³ II Cel., 146.

²⁴ *Ibid.*: "Tegite, inquit, eorum casus, multiplices supplete defectus, et cum haec feceritis, humiliores estote."

²⁵ Spec. Perf., LIV, L.

larger function of Christ's all-inclusive institution. The poor men, therefore, might not reasonably oppose its will or entertain fears of its hostility. They ought rather to render their Mother the humble obeisance of children who lovingly anticipate nourishment and protection at her hands.

Francis may at certain times have had occasion to question the reaction of Mother Church to his way of gospel poverty. He was prepared, however, at whatever cost, to demonstrate that poverty by submission to her maternal wishes. He never doubted that the church, which was Christ's own, would ultimately and inevitably defend that special renunciation in the Friars which was likewise Christ's will for them. He averred that persecution itself at the hands of the church's servants could not shake his faith in those ministers of the Divine. Christ's church must respond in the end to the unalterable demands of the Lord, who had given Francis his truly Catholic commission.²⁶ He did not hesitate, therefore, to pledge his loyalty to the church, to her pontiff,²⁷ and to her institutional procedures.²⁸ He sought, finally, to subordinate his life and brethren to the historic church as to the authoritative guardian of his Christ-inspired poverty. The Pope was to be asked "to assign them a cardinal of the Holy Roman Church, who shall be the guide, protector, and corrector of the brotherhood. . . ." In their subjection at the feet of Holy Church and in their steadfast Catholicity, they might truly carry out their promise to "observe the poverty, humility and holy Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ."²⁹

That interpretation which makes of Francis the purveyor of an ideal in rebellion against the ecclesiastical institution is not one supported by the evidence. There is little doubt that

²⁶ Test., 1-4.

²⁷ I Reg., Intro.; II Reg., 1.

²⁸ I Reg., 3, 19; II Reg., 3.

²⁹ II Reg., 12: " . . . ut semper subditi et subiecti pedibus eiusdem sanctae Ecclesiae stabiles in fide catholica paupertatem et humilitatem et sanctum Evangelium Domini nostri Iesu Christi, quod firmiter promissimus, observemus."

he experienced some tension between the voluntary ideal of poverty as he conceived it and the practice of poverty as the hierarchy construed it even in his lifetime. It is false, however, to picture Francis as breaking his heart over the alternative of evangelical poverty or ecclesiastical loyalty.³⁰ He resolved the tension in part by demonstrating the highest dictates of poverty through his very submission to the superior will of Christ's church. He might not be able to see with human eye the fullness of the divine plan. He did perceive, with the eye of faith, that the Christ of poverty was the Christ of the church. Secure in that faith, he could not doubt that the divine institution would protect the followers of Christ's renunciatory ideal. The later history of his fraternity revealed a deviation from the ideal by the church and by the Friars also. Francis may have foreseen more than a little of that possibility. In last analysis, however, he left his Testament as a monument to his faith in poverty and in the church as the protector of it. The testimony of the *Speculum* and of Celano to that faith is a genuine one. Francis believed that no true poverty could flourish where obedience to the church was not manifested. He was equally certain that the church of Christ, in her love of the Gospel, would aid her Friars to a perfect service of the Gospel. She would act as a guardian of the Minors against their detractors. She would, likewise, so cherish evangelical poverty as espoused by the Minors that she would brook no diminution of its service by them.³¹

Francis felt that his special way of poverty, originally laid down by Christ, was an indispensable part of the church's saving ministry. He never faltered in his conviction that the voluntary support of the institutional church was indispensable to his way of resignation. According to Heiler, "None knew so well as the Saint of Assisi himself that the Franciscan

³⁰ Sabatier, who once espoused this interpretation, later denounced as not genuine the extreme form which it assumed in *Spec. Perf.*, I.

³¹ II Cel., 24; *Spec. Perf.*, LXXVIII; *Tres Soc.* (XVI), 63-67.

ideal without the protection and care of the church had no continuance."³² The church was the divine-human perpetuator of all Christ's projects throughout the centuries preceding the last days. Poverty, be it ever so much the peculiar mission of a limited few, must inhere at last in the ecclesiastical institution. It must procure its vitality and derive its durability from that all-embracing agency which represented God's will upon earth.³³

Francis had joyous recourse to the worship of the church. His call had been issued through it, and his apostolate was sustained by it. Breviary and Missal called his attention to characters and events which gave vitality to his career of renunciation.³⁴ Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection stood forth in all the glory of self-surrender. The life of the Blessed Virgin recalled the events of Annunciation, Conception, Nativity, and Passion so intimately related to Jesus' poverty. The courageous renunciation of John the Baptist, Christ's herald and preacher of repentance, was memorialized. Peter and Paul lived again their sacrificial mission to the world. The Evangelists, through whose words Francis' poverty commission had been transmitted, claimed an honored place. The lives of martyrs, confessors, saints, presbyters, bishops, and Holy Fathers, who had renounced themselves for the Master, were held in loving memory. Readings from Prophets, Psalmists, Epistles, and Gospels stirred Francis' appreciation for Christ's consecrated servants of old. Pithy homilies were preserved from Ambrose, Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, and many others who had counseled

³² Heiler, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

³³ Sabatier, *Vie* (1931), pp. xxxviii-xxxix.

³⁴ The function of liturgical books as Francis conceived it is indicated in I Reg., 3; II Reg., 3; II Cel., 91, 62, 195. The rich variety of liturgical materials available to the thirteenth century is suggested by a valuable Franciscan Breviary of ca. 1250-1260 now in the possession of the Boston Public Library. A scholarly description of it is provided by Zoltán Haraszti, "An Early Franciscan Breviary," *More Books*, VI (1931), 327-340. Consult also A. Cholat (ed.), *Bréviaire de Sainte Claire*, Opuscles de critique historique, t. II (Paris, 1904).

Christian perfection. Tribute was paid to the Archangel Michael and to the protecting heavenly hosts. Prayers, hymns, sacred readings, and sermons joined the poor life of Christ and his Bible to the destiny of the living church and the poor men. The episodes and characters which meant most to Francis in his ministry of renunciation were those which he encountered daily in the church's service manuals and in its Catholic worship.³⁵ He kept the divine office scrupulously, according to the rite of the Holy Roman Church. He enjoined it upon his friars with reasonable attention to fasts, prayers, and other divine ceremonies.³⁶ Proper emphasis was accorded the Pater Noster, Credo in Deum, Gloria Patri, and Requiem Eternam.³⁷

The services of the church impressed upon Francis the high place in God's plan of presbyters, bishops, and the Pontiff in particular. He adopted the worship procedure and employed the liturgical devices which were laid down by the Papal church. He thus bound himself through Christ's earthly vicar with the Lord of poverty.³⁸ Just as Catholic liturgy revealed in its Scriptures the basis of renunciation, so that same liturgy united Francis and his poverty with the destiny of Christ's victorious church. The Poor Man and his special mission thus became a vital part of that larger Christian communion which triumphed throughout the ages. The Christian cultus exalted the very symbols which figured so boldly in Franciscan poverty. It raised up the poor, humble, obedient Christ. The Holy Cross of Christ's Passion was its sacred standard. The Mass book opened perpetually to the

³⁵ I Reg., 23, 3, 19, 20; II Reg., 3; Verb. Admon., 1, 26; Epist. ad cap. gen., 1-5. De reverentia, *Opuscula*, pp. 22-23.

³⁶ I Reg., 3, 19; Test., 10, 3; Epist. ad cap. gen., 6.

³⁷ I Reg., 3.

³⁸ For detailed analyses of Francis' relation to liturgical development, see esp. E. Clop, "Saint François et la liturgie de la chapelle Papale," AFH, XIX (1926), 753-802. Cf. also H. Dausend, *Der Franziskanerorden und die Entwicklung der Liturgie* (Münster in W., 1924); Sesselvalle, *op. cit.*, I, 245-259.

sacrifice of the poor Savior. The Eucharist imparted the sacred elements of its cosmic mysteries.

Francis thus waited in reverent attendance upon the institutional church. His poverty program was forever joined to the efficacy of its sacramental graces. The Lord's will for him, as for all others, was transmitted through its revered traditions, in its systematic, undeviating rites. The church thus demonstrated its efficiency as the agent of the divine behest. By means of it, Christ extended his grace to the time-transcending community of all the blessed. Through it, he spoke to chosen poor men in later times as the Divine had called out Abraham, Moses, and Isaiah in earlier times. The vitality which the heroes of the past assumed in the church's worship proclaimed for Francis a great certainty. He knew that Christ's will for him in his own age was a part of the special dispensation of select personalities in all ages. In fact, to be a called individual was to belong to a community of chosen workmen for the Lord. He was intrusted with a distinctive task because he served humbly in the company of that larger whole.

The mysterious efficacy of the sacraments brought further assurance to the humble Assisan. It showed him that the God who revealed his miraculous glories in the past still worked through the church in those truly Catholic souls whom he elected to call. The immortal life of the saints and of the angels in glory was Francis' environing support. The humble Christ of the Eucharist was still the sovereign of his poor life.

On the altar Christ voluntarily made himself poor that men might be made rich unto salvation. In that divine mystery the cosmic plan of redemption was made efficacious upon the human plane. For Francis the divine condescension of the Christ, who so humbled himself unto man's salvation as to hide himself under a morsel of bread, constituted the

greatest act of voluntary dispossession.³⁹ The Eucharist was thus more than an institutional formula. It was the cosmic focus of life. The destiny of man was here determined by a vicarious, sacrificial act of Divinity itself. A free act of divine self-abnegation thereby challenged the fullest, most liberating poverty of self-will that man, through God's grace, could offer in reciprocal love.⁴⁰

In the Mass of the church, the whole program of Christ's poverty reached its most fruitful objective. The renunciatory passion, which had characterized his whole life and death, had been directed towards the rescue of men from the captivity of earth to the kingdom of life. It was that same passion with a like objective to which he had called the Friars. When, therefore, Christ voluntarily relinquished his all in the Eucharist, he demonstrated without qualification the redemptive poverty which he demanded of his little brethren. At the same time he released that regenerating vitality which joined earth and heaven in restored harmony with God. This divine act of reconciliatory poverty bridged the chasm between the natural order of sinful man and the supernatural order of the approaching kingdom. God was the supreme end and determiner of both orders. Christ was the beloved, cosmic agent through whom the existing duality of life was to be resolved into the ultimate unity of God's divine society. Even Christ the Son could not compass that majestic accord apart from the most awe-inspiring miracle of sacrificial love. In literal truth the life which he had renounced on the Cross was clearly laid down again for men as often as the Eucharistic sacrifice was re-enacted. The Mass exemplified the abject poverty of him who, as a child, had lain in the poor manger; of him who had given up life itself on the Cross.⁴¹

³⁹ Epist. ad cap. gen., 2.

⁴⁰ *Loc. cit.*; cf. N. Gehr, *Le Saint Sacrifice de la Messe: son explication dogmatique, liturgique et ascétique* (2 vols.; Paris, 1894), I, 207, 205, 218.

⁴¹ Epist. ad cap. gen., 1; Col. 1:20; cf. Gehr, *op. cit.*, I, 205; Benz, *op. cit.*, pp. 163 ff.; Sabatier, *Études*, pp. 261-262, 326.

It must not be forgotten, however, that the mystery of the Eucharist transformed death into life; that the poverty here illustrated opened to all repentant sinners the riches of the kingdom. The Christ here disclosed was "no more to die but to triumph in the glorified eternity: on whom the angels desire to look."⁴² He was the way, the truth, and the life by whom alone men were to come to the Father and to the kingdom.

Christ in the Eucharist was not only carrying out the redemptive commission of his divine parent; he was also associating himself afresh with his chosen ones. Even as he had humbled himself and renounced regal glories to enter the virgin womb of the Poor Mary, so daily, in humblest fashion and in like poverty, he descended from the bosom of the Father to the altar in the hands of the priest. There he was visible, in the fullness of his life, to all who should envision him in faith. Especially was he a vital presence to those whom he had called to a peculiar dedication of poverty like unto his own. Just as he had revealed himself to the "holy apostles in his true flesh, so he showed himself [to his friars] in the sacred bread." Francis was convinced that "even as in His flesh they saw only His humanity, although believing in and contemplating His Divinity itself; so we, seeing the Bread and Wine with our bodily eyes, firmly believe that these are His most holy Body and His true and living Blood."⁴³

Furthermore, Francis was certain that just as the living words of the poor Christ were vitalized in the Bible dramas of the liturgy, so the immortal being of the Christ in poverty was linked with his followers through the unique functions of the Mass. "It is in this way that the Lord is always with His disciples, even as He Himself says, 'Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.'"⁴⁴

⁴² Epist. ad cap. gen., 2.

⁴³ Verb. Admon., 1.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*; Matt. 28:20.

The Christ of direst poverty, and therefore of richest life, was thus a real presence in the midst of his messengers in the last times. Until he returned in triumphant judgment, he was corporally visible to his poor men in the sacramental mysteries only. To fail to see and experience him there was to fail of life itself, now and hereafter. To eat his Body and to drink his Blood was to have life eternal.⁴⁵

The crucial significance of the church's functions in the life of poverty is thus readily apparent. The reality of Christ's Gospel Word was vitalized in the liturgy throughout. The intimate conjunction of the Friars with the contemporary founder of their strategic poverty was possible only through the mysteries of the Eucharist. Those mysteries could be fruitfully set in operation by the church and its ministers, and by them alone. The pivotal association of the poor men, with their poor Master, had been placed by the Christ in the hands of the church and in her hands only.⁴⁶ Well might Francis exclaim in an ecstasy of Catholic obedience to the priests of the church: "I act thus, because in this world I see nothing corporally of the Most High Son of God if it be not His most holy Body and Blood which they [the priests] receive and which they alone administer to others."⁴⁷ The church was, in truth, through its mysterious revelation of Christ's poor redeeming life, the promulgator of the Friars' poverty.

Catholicism was thus the one agency which could recreate both the words and the life of Christ in poverty. This institution presented to men of every age Him who transcended all ages. Francis' Master, who voluntarily impoverished himself in the Eucharist, was enabled through this sacrament to enrich the lives of sinners everywhere. Though offered on many altars, he nevertheless remained undivided and undiminished in his vitality. Francis declared feelingly that

⁴⁵ Test., 3; Verb. Admon., 1.

⁴⁶ Batault, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁴⁷ Test., 3.

"He works as it may please Him with the Lord God the Father, and the Holy Ghost the Paraclete, world without end. Amen."⁴⁸

Francis could never be sufficiently thankful to the church. Through it, Christ's divine surrender became the means of salvaging erring mortals to the redeeming society of the future.⁴⁹ As a follower of poverty, Francis was necessarily a loyal Catholic in the fullest sense. He subscribed not merely in theory to some church invisible, but most practically in fullest obedience to the visible and hierarchical institution also. He revered it as the Christ-founded agent of the Master, who made himself redeemingly poor in the sacraments. To be true to Christ's poverty was to be increasingly Catholic.⁵⁰

The thought of Christ's "loving condescension, of that most condescending love," exhibited in the sacrament of the Body and Blood suffused Francis with a glowing fervor. He heard the Mass with reasonable frequency and with edifying devoutness.⁵¹ He exhibited a touching reverence for all the sacred names, words of institution, officiating priests, altars, and churches which were associated with the holy mysteries. In the church of the Portiuncula, as in others so holy unto the poverty of Christ and his mother, Francis was not content to preach the message of Jesus' saving renunciation. He took special pains to see that cleanliness everywhere surrounded the pure, sacred mysteries.⁵² He regarded it as the joyous duty of his brotherhood to protect the Lord's Body and Blood against any possible desecration. Legend ascribes to him a special affection for "the province of France," because truest Catholic reverence was there accorded the Blessed Body of Christ.⁵³

⁴⁸ Epist. ad cap. gen., 3; Robinson, *Writings*, pp. 115-116.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-3.

⁵⁰ Heiler, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31.

⁵¹ II Cel., 201; "Liber Exemplorum Fratrum Minorum Saeculi XIII . . .," ed. P. Livarius Oliger, in *Antonianum*, II (1927), 239, deals with the proper manner of celebrating the Mass without undue delay.

⁵² II Cel., 201; Spec. Perf., LVI.

⁵³ Leg. ant., 103 f. Francis is credited with the assertion: "In nomine

Each time that Christ offered himself in Eucharistic sacrifice he renewed visibly his bond with the elect Minors. He identified their destiny with his own until the end of time and throughout a glorified eternity. Rich beyond compare, Christ left heavenly splendor to be born in poverty; to live in want; to die in nudity on a cross between malefactors; to repose in an alien tomb; to sacrifice himself in poverty anew at the hands of the priestly church; and to vitalize men afresh with his surrendered life unto an eternal kingdom.⁵⁴

Francis' personality was unreservedly Catholic. The central rite of the Church was also the prime fact of his religious experience, the Christ-fed source of his mystic inner life.⁵⁵ It was likewise the heart of his practical action. The relation which he bore to Christ in the Mass was one of real, if mysterious communion. He spoke to Christ and heard his answer. He derived from Him light and life. He offered himself at the same time Christ was offered.

The church in Francis' experience was not only the guardian of Scripture and tradition; it was also the incorporation of God's power. In its sacraments Francis and his elect brethren were unified, sanctified, and rededicated supernaturally to Christ's ultimate victory. They were especially detailed to facilitate his program of saving renunciation. During the last times and in obedient co-operation with ecclesiastical officials, they announced the world to come. The Bible of the church was the Bible of their poverty. The Christ in the Mass was their naked Christ. The consummation which the church expected they announced. The coming of Christ which the church soberly taught they joyously heralded in the freedom of voluntary dispossession.

D. N. I. C. et eius gloriose Virginis Matris et omnium sanctorum eligo provinciam Francie, in qua est catholica gens, maxime quia inter alios catholicos sancte Ecclesie reverentiam magnam exhibent Corpori Christi: quod mihi plurimum, gratum est" (*loc. cit.*). Cf. Spec. Perf., LXV.

⁵⁴ Consult the suggestive, if not always disinterested, summary of *Expos. Reg.*, Cap. III, Oliger ed., pp. 82-83 ff.

⁵⁵ Heiler, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-40.

CHAPTER VII

MYSTICISM AND THE DIVINE UNION

MYSTICAL EXPERIENCES vary as widely as the personalities who sustain them. Mystics in general, however, press forward to the common goal of complete union with the Divine. The soul seeks direct, unmediated knowledge of God and the deep, enfolding satisfaction of intimate communion with Him in love. The individual who enjoys this sacred association knows God with an intuitive comprehension which transcends that of ordinary knowledge. The sense of identification with reality is as certain as the mystic state is ineffable.

The mystic loses his sense of separateness in the sacred mystery of divine oneness. The means by which different individuals attain to such satisfying unity may vary greatly. One soul may go from transport to transport, while another progresses gradually, and without tumult, into personal relationship with the ultimate truth, which is God. The mystic may feel himself suspended at times, powerless and inert, in the grasp of the divine initiative. In mystical experience at its best, however, there is ceaseless effort to surmount the obstacles to union of the soul with God. Consuming love for the Divine purifies the spirit and incites it to an inspiring witness for God among men.¹

¹ For mystical experience and the desire for union with the Divine, see H. Delacroix, *Études d'histoire et de psychologie du mysticisme: les grands mystiques Chrétiens* (Paris, 1908); W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York, 1902), pp. 380-381, 419; J. H. Leuba, *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism* (New York, 1925), pp. 116-184; W. B. Selbie, *The Psychology of Religion* (Oxford, 1924), pp. 245, 261-262; M. De Wulf, *Histoire de la philosophie médiévale* (2d ed.; Paris, 1905), pp. 225-227; R. M. Jones, *Spiritual Energies in Daily Life* (New York, 1922), pp. 136-138, 158-159; E. Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (12th ed.; London, 1930).

Francis knew the ravishment of spiritual ecstasy and the tender caress of more sober contemplation. With poverty he laid siege to all obstacles which separated him from the love of God. Only when severed from every selfish affection and despoiled of every material possession could he surrender his being to the embrace of divine unity. Complete renunciation was indispensable to the apostolate of charity to which the mystic experience of Christ's love inspired him. His devotion to his Master in poverty was constant and impassioned. His whole career was a sincere attempt to bring men to share with him the recreative experience of life unified in the love of God's Son. With such rapturous *amour* and imaginative *élan* did he project himself into the life and sufferings of the Savior that he seemed to be "wholly changed into Jesus."² Bonaventura, with characteristic imagery, declares that Francis "yearned to be utterly transformed into Him by the fire of his exceeding love." The flame of divine love seemed to consume him as a coal burned with fire. At the slightest reference to the love of God, the inner chords of his heart stirred as if in vibration to some bow without. As he partook of the sacrament of the Lord's body, "he became like one inebriated in spirit, and rapt out of himself in ecstasy." His life was a prolonged immolation of body and spirit out of love for Christ.³

Poverty alone could prepare Francis' soul for such absolute exposure to the divine influence. It alone could drain his spirit of all divided interests and leave him empty for the indwelling of the divine, integrating love. With single-minded devotion to the Lord, Francis espoused Lady Poverty, the Queen of Christ's earthly life.

² *The Little Flowers*, p. 114; cf. Spec. Perf., XCI-XCIII; Tres Soc., 69.

³ Bon., IX, 1-2. That the fervor of his mystical exaltation may sometimes have passed the bounds of healthy mysticism is evidenced by his relations with lepers, by his mistreatment of his body, etc. Cf. Bon., II, 6; Spec. Perf., XCI-XCII; II Cel., 210; Tres Soc., 14.

Francis had a volatile imagination and an intuitive appreciation of the dramatic value of symbols. He capitalized the readiness of his age to see in outward things an inner, symbolic meaning. An ideal of unattractive and even forbidding aspect could thus be presented to the common people with such charm and animation as to win not only their toleration, but also their enthusiastic welcome.⁴ He found in chivalry and the idealization of womanly charm a symbol of the poverty which united him with Christ in the bonds of divine love. He discovered therein a satisfying outlet for his own romantic tendencies and a dramatic, imaginative challenge to the restless idealism of men about him.⁵ In contrast with the uncouth, often inconsiderate, treatment of woman in the feudal age, there did exist a mystical, though somewhat artificial, worship of idealized womanhood. In the exaggerated pretensions of chivalry and of mystical devotion to the Holy Virgin there was, to a certain degree, a real spiritualization of life through more sublimated association with feminine grace and purity.⁶

Francis was dominated from an early age by the powerful attraction of knightly sentiment and devotion. Business routine appealed but little to his restless, imaginative nature, with its ambitions for chivalric love and military glory.⁷ His was the age of the troubadours, who were then entering Italy with their lyric celebration of daring men and beautiful women. Traveling merchants, perhaps his own father among them, brought stories of France and her bold cavaliers. The tales of Roland, Oliver, and the Table Round were stock in

⁴ For the place of allegories, personifications, and the "méthode symbolique" in mystical experience see De Wulf *op. cit.*, p. 227; Beaufreton, *St. François*, pp. 63-71.

⁵ Davison, *op. cit.*, p. 7; Dubois, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-102; D. H. S. Nicholson, *The Mysticism of St. Francis of Assisi* (London, 1923), p. 133.

⁶ W. R. Inge, *Christian Mysticism* (6th ed.; London, 1925), p. 176, n. 1; F. E. von Hürter, *Tableau des institutions et des mœurs de l'église au moyen âge* (Paris, 1843), III, 249.

⁷ Bon., I, 3.

trade of his fancy. He himself never lost his boyhood predilection for the French language; he made of his own brethren the spiritual troubadours and *joculatores Domini* of a new age of joyous religious feeling.⁸

The young Assisan entered, with boundless ardor, into the prosecution of a knightly vocation. He participated in a war with Perugia and then spent a period of imprisonment in planning valorous deeds for the future. After his return home, his dreams were still those of fair ladies, burnished armor, and military prowess. Only gradually was it borne in upon him that his was to be no career of secular knight-hood. He was to bear arms for the Sovereign of the Universe; his knightly courage was to be proved in the service of Lady Poverty.⁹

One evening when, as master of the revels, he lagged behind his boisterous companions, he received a spiritual visitation. When his friends found him, with his face still reflecting his rapture, they twitted him with being about to take a bride. And he answered, "Truly have ye spoken, for that I thought of taking unto me a bride, nobler and richer and fairer than ever ye have seen." And the legend continues that this bride of which he spoke was true Religion, "nobler, richer and fairer than others in her poverty."¹⁰

Whatever the course of his enlightenment, Francis soon found himself engaged in a newly revealed struggle for beauty and right. All of his earlier dreams of knightly glory were now to be realized in transmuted form. He now personified, as the fair Lady of his heart, that poverty through which he found access to his sovereign Lord. His affection for Lady Poverty, whom Christ had loved, became the symbol of his love for Christ and of mystic union with Him. Poverty thus envisaged, as a sweet, noble presence, supplied his own personal need for an ideal high, pure, and myste-

⁸ Spec. Perf., IV, 4; C, LXXII; Bon., II, 5; Sabatier, *Life*, pp. 5-6, 9; Jørgensen, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁹ Tres Soc., 5-6; Bon., I, 3-4.

¹⁰ Tres. Soc., 7.

rious, to which he could give sacrificial devotion. His Lady was, in addition, a beloved reminder of the Christ with whom she had enjoyed such intimate association.

To exemplify the poverty which Christ had espoused now became Francis' sacred commission. He projected, with all the reality which his lively imagination could lend to an ideal, a battle against great odds for a highborn lady, sadly abused. Dante has immortalized in verse the mystic nuptials of the Poverello with Lady Poverty. Francis consummated in spiritual wedlock his supernal love for her whom all men had shunned since the death of Christ, her first spouse.¹¹

In the affected language of their day, Celano and Bonaventura applaud Francis' repudiation of all the evanescent wealth and tawdry ambitions of men in order that he might espouse Lady Poverty, the familiar friend of the Son of God. The world's ostracism of her was all the more reason for his tender passion for her. The renunciation of home and of easy indulgence was a small price to pay for union with one in whose company he found the way to perfection and the guarantee of eternal riches. To know her intimately and purely was to enter the holy family of Christ himself.¹²

The famous "Prayer to Obtain Poverty," though not written by Francis, is a true portrayal of the spirit in which he approached his Lady. Francis is here represented as declaring before Christ his passion for this queen of all virtues, despised and rebuffed by all. It was for her that Christ renounced heaven and came to earth. In His eternal love he espoused her unto the begetting of perfect sons by her. At all times, and in every way, Poverty was true to Him. She accompanied Him from birth to death. She did him service by receiving Him in naught but a stable, depriving him of all things throughout life, and supporting him alone

¹¹ *Paradiso*, Canto XI, ll. 28-128, in Plumptre (tr.), *Lady Poverty*, pp. 200-209; see Nicholson, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-134.

¹² II Cel., 55; Bon., VII, 1.

during his Passion. In His crucifixion she was intimately joined to him, preparing for him but a rude cross and a few nails from whose bluntness he suffered increased agonies. She was so far true to herself and to Him as to deny Him water wherewith to quench his death thirst. In his burial and resurrection, likewise, he did not pass from her ubiquitous care. To her he finally gave the seal of the kingdom of heaven with which to mark those desiring to walk in the way of perfection. Francis longed for the impress of that seal. In the name of the Christ, who had so loved Poverty, Francis swore to be true to her who communed so intimately with the Savior.¹³

Remembering in tears the poverty of Christ and his mother, Francis reflected that she must, indeed, be queen of all virtues who "shone forth thus excellently in the King of Kings and in the Queen His Mother."¹⁴ In order to scale the heights whereon God in his love for Poverty had exalted her, Francis, her lover also, was willing to cast off the trammels of every earthly sin and pleasure. By mounting in love to the eminence of Lady Poverty, he approached more closely to the Divine, who had thus set her apart.¹⁵

Throughout his life Francis chose to make his chief boast in the privilege of poverty, which he referred to variously as his mother, his bride, and his lady. Along with his dying admonition to mutual love and regard for the clergy of Holy Mother Church, was the central plea to remember Dame Poverty. Divested of all possessions, even clothing, he died in the joyful realization that he had been true to Lady Poverty, in whom he had beheld the most transforming beauty of all his life.¹⁶ The curtain had rung down on a play, but not on a farce. In his striking use of the chivalric motif, he

¹³ *Lady Poverty*, p. 183; *Writings*, pp. 139-141; Bon., VII; Actus, XIII.

¹⁴ Bon., VII, 1.

¹⁵ *Lady Poverty*, pp. 16-19.

¹⁶ Bon., VII, 6; Spec. Perf., LXXXVII, 17-19; II Cel., 215-216.

may frequently have worn thin the application of allegory and symbol. His aptitude for personification was exhibited here, as elsewhere, without serious lapses into the slough of eroticism. His personification of the poverty ideal served to make dearer and more real to him the mystic union with the Lord, who had loved poverty before him.

Asceticism was one phase of that absolute poverty by which Francis sought ultimate union with the Eternal. His ascetic practices frequently extended beyond the limits of moderate discipline, productive of a beautifully controlled life. His discriminations against the flesh partook all too often of a harsh dualism. A careful study reveals, of course, that the man who brought to life so much of joy and song frequently modified in others, and sometimes in himself, the unhealthy rigors of ascetic extremes. That his zeal for poverty and his yearning for God sometimes led him to violate true moderation cannot be denied.¹⁷

Celano reveals with what care Francis guarded his Lady Poverty. To obviate superfluity, he allowed no vessel to be brought into the house unless necessity absolutely demanded it. He thought it impossible to satisfy need without yielding obedience to pleasure. He seldom allowed himself to eat cooked food. When he did so, he mixed it with ashes or quenched the flavor in cold water. He barely took what was necessary to support life. When a guest of princes he habitually took a little meat, and then, under pretense of eating the remainder, disposed of it covertly in his clothing. He warned against superfluity in eating and in drinking; drank no wine; and scarcely allowed himself a sufficiency of water when consumed by thirst. A craving for any particular food was a warning to him to abstain from it wholly in the future.¹⁸

¹⁷ See Coulton, *Five Centuries*, II, 129-130; Nicholson, *op. cit.*, pp. 136 ff.

¹⁸ I Cel., 51; Bon., V, 1; Epist. ad fideles, 6.

As a penalty for having eaten some chicken during a period of illness, Francis caused himself to be dragged through the streets unclothed and with a rope fastened about his neck. The friar who thus unwillingly subjected him to such indignity was forced to cry out: "‘Come, look at the glutton who has been battenning on poultry that he has been eating when you did not know it.’"¹⁹ Perhaps, as Celano says, some observers did take timely warning from such dramatized penance. Francis doubtless wished to atone for any possible deviation in private from that absolute poverty for which he was publicly esteemed. A display of asceticism so thoroughly out of keeping with the insignificance of the fault committed had less of real modesty to recommend it, however, than a sane concession to bodily needs would have had. Though not clearly evident to him, his course of action was probably more of a buttress to his own pride than it was a shield to his humility. His finished showmanship came to the front, perhaps in spite of himself, and well-nigh substituted for the penitence he genuinely sought to perform, an insidious sense of complacency with the public satisfaction rendered. His action was a subtle incitement to the very admiration which, Celano declares, he sought by every means to avoid.²⁰

Francis sought to achieve contempt for himself as for a rejected vessel. He allowed himself no fears or anxieties for his body, lest it should cause him to covet any temporal thing.²¹ One biographer asserts that he "never spared his body, but exposed it, as something alien to himself, to all ill-treatment both in deed and word." He continually experimented with various methods for the securing of more rigorous abstinence, chastising the lusts of the flesh by afflicting it.²²

The Little Flowers preserves the legend of Francis' volun-

¹⁹ I Cel., 52; Spec. Perf., LXI.

²⁰ I Cel., 54.

²¹ I Cel., 53.

²² II Cel., 21; Spec. Perf., XXVII, 14; Bon., V, 1.

tary surrender of his body to the torment of numerous devils. He bade them go so far as God would permit, inasmuch as his body was his greatest enemy.²³ In his *Admonitions* Francis warned the brethren against placing the blame for sins or sufferings on some enemy or neighbor. They were reminded that each had a real enemy in the body by which he sinned—an enemy to be enchained and foiled of his evil attacks.²⁴ The examples are plentiful in which Francis subjected his body, *brother ass*, to the chastening of severe asceticism. He feared especially the temptations emanating from luxury and softness. He not only endured the cold in the scantiest of garments, but he also refused bedcovers; he preferred to sleep on the bare ground. He frequently slept sitting, or with a piece of stone or wood for a pillow.²⁵

Francis was most solicitous that the brethren avoid evil glances and the company of women, as well as private conversation with them. He was in constant fear lest even the sight of a woman might rekindle unchaste desires and awaken senses long asleep.²⁶ Sometimes, when attacked by carnal temptations, he would plunge into a pit of ice or a ditch of snow in order to subdue incipient lust.²⁷ Bonaventura declares that on one occasion the Saint anticipated a grievous temptation of the flesh by laying aside his habit and scourging himself with a cord. Then plunging his naked body into a great heap of snow, he constructed from the snow, with the aid of his febrile imagination, a wife, four children, and some servants. In the pure imagination of the service which such a family would require, he was delivered from the tempter.²⁸

The early brethren were not behind their leader in ascetic practices. They burdened their bodies with iron hoops and coats of mail, created ingenious devices with which to cheat

²³ *The Little Flowers*, p. 102.

²⁴ Verb. Admon., 10.

²⁶ I Reg., 12; II Reg., 11; Bon., V, 5.

²⁷ I Cel., 42; Bon., V, 3.

²⁵ Bon., V, 1-2, 6; I Cel., 52.

²⁸ Bon., V, 4.

themselves of sleep and rest, and submitted themselves to macerations of the flesh.²⁹ Francis, who seldom relaxed his harsh treatment of his own body, did try to temper the undue extremes of others. He tried to prevail upon his brethren to exchange utmost rigors of severity for that discretion which, however, he failed to exemplify in his own case.³⁰ He argued that it was necessary to supply with discretion the needs of the body which might otherwise complain of its inability to render obedient service to the spirit. If, when reasonably provided for, the body still showed itself negligent, fat, and sleepy in prayer, vigils, and good works, it was to be punished "like a bad and fat beast." It was to be taught "that a lazy beast wants the spur, and that the goad awaits a sluggish ass."³¹

Though most inconsiderate of his own infirmities, Francis was led by his compassion for others to "be weak with them that are weak and afflicted with them that are afflicted."³² When in the middle of the night a brother cried out that he was dying of hunger, Francis had the other friars arise and partake of a common meal with him in order that the hungry brother might eat without shame. He made it clear, of course, that he did this out of charity rather than inclination; and that charity, not food, was to be their example. He declared that indiscreet deprivation of the body was as bad as gluttony.³³

The Poverello is reported as saying, "But I will and command you that each of our brethren according to our poverty

²⁹ II Cel., 21; I Cel., 40-41; Spec. Perf., XXVII.

³⁰ Bon., V, 1, 7; Tres Soc., 59; Actus, XX, 26-29; Spec. Perf., XXVII, 11-12; XVI.

³¹ Spec. Perf., XCVII; II Cel., 129. With little consistency Francis referred to his body as the enemy to a higher life, as the servant to spiritual needs, and as his own brother and companion in the service of Christ. He spoke, with characteristic disregard of logic and consistency, in accordance with the purpose and impulse which filled his mind at the instant.

³² Tres Soc., 59.

³³ II Cel., 22; Bon., V, 7; cf. also Spec. Perf., XXVIII, for an account of how Francis secretly ate grapes with a sick brother.

satisfy his body as it shall be necessary for him.”³⁴ Francis, however, continued to reject for himself the advice which he pressed upon others. From his conversion to his death, he subjected his own body to rigors beyond its feeble powers of endurance. When he saw the brethren exceeding the measure of poverty and decency in food and in other things, he delivered a manifesto wherein he pledged himself anew to make his life a worthy example for the Friars. He would be content with few and poor meats and with a paucity of other things also in keeping with poverty. He abjured everything sumptuous and delicate.³⁵

Commenting upon Francis’ plea for consideration of the body, Celano writes, “In this teaching alone did the most holy father’s deeds not correspond with his words, for he subjected his body, assuredly innocent, to scourgings and hardships, multiplying wounds upon it without cause. . . .” Though enfeebled and wholly shattered in body, “he never halted in his pursuit of perfection, never suffered himself to relax the rigor of discipline; and even now that his body was worn out he could not give it even a little relief without some murmuring of conscience.”³⁶

A brother whom Francis consulted about the demands of the flesh chided him for his mistreatment of *brother body*. Francis admitted that his body and he had been in perfect accord concerning their voluntary service of the Lord. The brother asked, “Where, then, father, is thy liberality? Where thy compassion and thine eminent discretion?” Francis was forced to admit that he had been wanting in service to that faithful friend without whose aid he could not have served Christ. In remorse he cried, “Rejoice, brother body, and forgive me, for behold now I gladly fulfill thy desires, and gladly hasten to attend to thy complaints.” “But,” as Celano

³⁴ Spec. Perf., XXVII, 10.

³⁵ Spec. Perf., XXVII, 15-16; Spec. Perf., XVI.

³⁶ II Cel., 129; 210.

inquires, "what could delight his frail and exhausted body now? Francis was now dead to the world, but Christ was living in him."³⁷

In all of his ascetic practices, sometimes so lamentably removed from healthful spirituality, Francis was but seeking the complete fulfillment of that true poverty by which he progressed to union and love with Christ in God. Asceticism was not an end in itself. It played a vital part in the program of poverty.³⁸ Francis deplored that the body claimed for itself and transferred to its own glory "what had been given not to it, but to the soul."³⁹ Self-conquest and the voluntary subjection of body and soul to every woe for the love of Christ was, for Francis, the greatest gift of the Savior to His beloved. Francis admonished his followers to hate the body with its vices and sins, to practice self-denial, and to place the body under the yoke of holy obedience and servitude. Carnal living was bound to result in the loss of the divine love and of eternal life.⁴⁰

Celano explains that although Francis' own flesh was in voluntary subjection to the spirit, he chastised it, nevertheless, for example's sake. His love for Christ led him to set himself up as a pattern of perfection for the salvation of souls which he hoped to bring into new love and union with Jesus.⁴¹ His own consuming love for the Savior and his Passion was responsible in part for his neglect and mortification of his body. In memory of that Passion he mortified himself not only with tears, but with abstinence from food and drink.⁴²

Francis was probably more interested in loving God and in leading others to love Him than he was in giving ascetic prescriptions. Asceticism and self-annihilation, however, were

³⁷ II Cel., 210-211; Tres Soc., 14.

³⁸ Nicholson, *op. cit.*, pp. 43, 60. ³⁹ II Cel., 134.

⁴⁰ Actus, VII, 18; *The Little Flowers*, VIII; Epist. ad fideles, 6-7; I Reg., 22.

⁴¹ II Cel., 172-173.

⁴² Spec. Perf., XCI-XCII; Tres Soc., 14.

negative means to the positive end toward which his whole life was moving. "The positive side of his life is the end to which that self-annihilation is directed, and that end, with St. Francis as with all the mystics, was the direct knowledge of and communion with God which was in fact the crown of all his struggles."⁴³ Asceticism as an integral part of absolute poverty brought that true liberty and freedom which was not independence, but dependence on God alone.⁴⁴

Francis found in poverty the great emancipating influence in his life. Poverty meant release from those confused longings and material complexities which frustrate the union of the soul with its God. To be poor in earth's valuables was to be rich in the eternal treasures. St. Francis first knew the exhilaration which accompanies renunciation when he surrendered everything to his father and, glad and free, sought a hidden solitude. Relieved of all worldly encumbrances, he could the more readily enter the divine service.⁴⁵ Above all, he "longed to be dissolved and to be with Christ." "Wherefore," concludes Celano, "his chiefest study was to be free from all the things that are in the world, lest the serenity of his mind might even for a moment be troubled by the taint of any dust. He made himself insensible to the din of all outward things; and, gathering up with all his might from every side the outward senses, and keeping the natural impulses in check, occupied himself with God alone." This versified panegyric is not untrue to the man who grew rather than diminished in his service to neighbors at the same time

⁴³ Nicholson, *op. cit.*, p. 43; cf. Gratien, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁴⁴ That he shortened the span of his life by his ill-considered rigors seems quite probable. In his unthinking, passionate struggle to surmount all obstacles to the divine union, he employed measures which violated the highest principles of ethics. In his impatience to be at one with God, he laid waste the earthly temple in which God's spirit dwelt. He was hardly capable of analyzing the moral implications of all his acts. Examples already given show that he sensed, in a measure, the evil consequences of his extreme asceticism and was sorry, for the moment at least.

⁴⁵ Bon., II, 5; Tres Soc., 21; Nicholson, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

that he emptied himself of everything, the better to direct his mind to God.⁴⁶

The removal of every selfish excrescence from his personality left him serenely aware of the great ultimate being to which he longed to be united. Undisturbed by outward clamor, he was busily preparing within his heart a spacious habitation for God. Having given up all property, which detracted from perfect concentration on God, he could more fully possess everything in Him.⁴⁷ His associates, likewise, learned that stimulating liberty which is deliverance from all anxiety and freedom to know God without interruption. "The followers of most holy Poverty, having nothing, loved nothing, and therefore had no fear of losing anything. . . . Everywhere, therefore, they were secure, not kept in suspense by any fear; distracted by no care, they awaited the morrow without solicitude. . . ."⁴⁸ Poverty, therefore, was a guarantee against the cares which are a party to the acquisition of goods. Poverty was security against the fears which attend the keeping of property already won. The values which these early brethren acknowledged were not subject to the fluctuations of human fortune. The only things which the world could take from them were the very impediments which they sought voluntarily to be rid of. Having once stripped themselves of the garments of false riches, they were free to attire themselves in the robes of a free spirit. Francis derived gladness, confidence, and freedom from his earthly course of poverty.⁴⁹ In that freedom lay the joys of life without its grim, spectral forebodings. He and his confreres lived in blithe disregard of worry and pursued their way in joy, not in spite of their poverty but because of it. Poverty and joy meant freedom from cupidity and avarice.⁵⁰ The joy which he desired his brethren to feel and the hap-

⁴⁶ I Cel., 71.

⁴⁷ I Cel., 43-44.

⁴⁸ I Cel., 39; Bon., IV, 7.

⁴⁹ II Cel., 55.

⁵⁰ Tres Soc., 45, 59; I Cel., 35; Verb. Admon., 27.

piness which shone from their faces were the raptures of souls set free through poverty. He could not bear to see his friars exhibit themselves sorrowfully like gloomy hypocrites when they had cause, above all men, to show themselves joyful in the Lord, cheerful and fitly agreeable. Poverty was not a burden to be borne, but a privilege to be duly appreciated. The brother who could not radiate cheer could hardly have experienced voluntary poverty. Francis could see how a man might well have reason to groan and weep as he examined himself before his God in secret. Outwardly, however, he was to rejoice in the Lord and be merry, joyful, and gracious as was meet.⁵¹

The Poverello was not demanding cheap frivolity and artificial gaiety. He knew from his own experience that a man cannot always be gay. He did not want vain words, laughter, or actions which would produce laughter. He coveted proper gravity and maturity in demeanor for all his friars. What he did want was the quiet cheer and modest joy of men whose deportment reflected their fervor and solicitude in all good works. Spiritual joy he held to be a kind of prophylactic against the virus of the Serpent.⁵²

The early brethren were apt pupils of their master, who taught them poverty and its beatitudes. Whatever the difficulties of their situation, they were not sad or cast down. Theirs was an inner exuberance not conditioned upon external circumstances. Sharing in poverty the pittance which they had collected, they celebrated a feast of thanksgiving with glad hearts. They exulted at the absence of anything which might give them carnal delight. In their communion with poverty they were comforted beyond measure by the lack of all things worldly. They delighted in God's comfort alone. They vowed never to shrink from the embrace

⁵¹ I Reg., 7; II Cel., 128.

⁵² Spec. Perf., XCIII, XCV-XCVI; II Cel., 127, 125.

of poverty, which had brought them this beatific union with the Divine.⁵³

The words of a legend are suggestive as to the primitive state of the Franciscan mind. "In poverty they rejoiced exceedingly, since they were not desirous of riches, but scorned all transitory things such as might be greedily desired by lovers of this world. . . . They rejoiced in the Lord continually, having naught within them or without that could in any wise make them sad. For the farther they were sundered from the world, so much the nearer were they joined unto the Lord." Those who had an aptitude for preaching traversed the world in joy of spirit, traveling like pilgrims and strangers, burdened with nothing save the books wherewith to say the Hours.⁵⁴

As Francis and Brother Giles passed through the March of Ancona, they exulted mightily in the Lord. Their gladness was that of men who had found a great treasure in the gospel field of Lady Poverty. In a voice loud and clear Francis sang praises to God in French. He seems to have had frequent recourse to that language as a medium for the expression of his felicity. Sometimes he would improvise on an imaginary violin, which he made by putting a stick over his left arm and by drawing across it a little bow bent with a string. With proper motions he would then sing in French about the Lord.⁵⁵

The sources say that Francis composed a song about the Lord and his creatures and taught the brethren to sing it.⁵⁶ He wanted Brother Pacifico, once known as the King of Verses, to go with some friars throughout the world preaching and singing as minstrels of the Lord. The spiritual well-

⁵³ Tres Soc., 39; I Cel., 35, 34. ⁵⁴ Tres Soc., 45, 59.

⁵⁵ Tres Soc., 33; II Cel., 127; Spec. Perf., XCIII.

⁵⁶ Probably the famous "Sun Song" to be referred to later; cf. Boehmer, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-66; *Writings*, pp. 118-120; Spec. Perf., C; II Cel., 217.

being of their hearers was to be their only concern. "For what," challenged Francis, "are the servants of the Lord but His minstrels who should raise the hearts of men and move them to spiritual joy." He believed that the Minors, especially, had been given to God's people for their welfare.⁵⁷ Those poor brethren, in their liberation from the temporal vexations of the day, were peculiarly fitted to induct others into the sacred mysteries of the jubilant soul, bared utterly to the vitalizing rays of God's love.

In all of God's creation Francis enjoyed the beauty and the unity of that common brotherhood of life which possesses all things from the bounty of Providence. The poverty of all mundane things left him free to take his place in that joyous existence which is unified by dependence on God alone. In every living creature there stirred the breath which God infused into it. Men and creatures alike were begotten of the Lord's will unto a universe of fraternal harmony. In poverty man drew nearer to that dispensary of love and mercy around which all nature was gathered. In this state of voluntary poverty, man sat down with all created things to the repast provided by the Father of all life.

In the sight of that joy which dwelt in all God's works, Francis was uplifted in love to the life-giving first cause. In all of life's beauties he saw reflected the One most beautiful. By the imprints of that supreme comeliness left upon the visible creation, Francis found his way to the Beloved One. He made of all things a ladder whereby he might ascend to his supreme desire. "For by the impulse of his unexampled devotion he tasted that fountain of goodness that streameth forth, as in rivulets, in every created thing, and he perceived as it were an heavenly harmony in the concord of the virtues and actions granted unto them by God, and did sweetly exhort them to praise the Lord, even as the Prophet David had done."⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Spec. Perf., C, 15-20.

⁵⁸ Bon., IX, 1; Ps. 148.

Francis derived ecstatic pleasure from the contemplation of the wisdom, power, and goodness of the Creator. He gazed in rapture at the sun, moon, stars, and all other creatures of the Heavenly Father. He picked up little worms and put them in a safe place. God's simple little man was inspired by the beauty of the flowers to which he preached as if they were endowed with reason. In naïve language he addressed exhortations to cornfields, vineyards, and stones—to earth, fire, and wind. He would have them render a due tribute of love and willing service to their maker.⁵⁹ He called all creatures by the name of brother. "He discerned the hidden things of creation with the eye of the heart, as one who had already escaped into the glorious liberty of the children of God."⁶⁰

The Saint was deeply sensitive to the suffering of beasts as well as of men. His heart was moved with tenderness for little lambs which, in their humility and innocence, were symbols of like qualities in the Christ. He bartered his cloak for the freedom of some of these little brethren when he came upon them destined for the market. He rescued from a like fate some turtle doves which aroused his compassion by reason of their own sad case and because of their place in scriptural reference. He exhorted them to be fruitful and multiply in accordance with their Creator's injunction. They dwelt in the company of the brethren, laying their eggs and raising their young before the eyes of the Friars.⁶¹

Francis felt impelled to sing to the glory of God a new song in praise of his creatures. In honor of the sun, fairest of all created things, Francis called his praises of God's creatures the "Song of Brother Sun."⁶² In this immortal hymn in praise of created things, Francis lauded the goodness and omnipotence of the Most High, together with the

⁵⁹ Epist. ad fideles, 10.

⁶⁰ I Cel., 80-81.

⁶¹ I Cel., 77-79; *The Little Flowers*, p. 41.

⁶² Spec. Perf., CXIX, CXX, C; II Cel., 217.

beauty and worth of all of his creatures. Especially did the Saint celebrate the beauty, radiance, and splendor of Brother Sun, similitude of the Most High, and likened to the Sun of Righteousness. The comeliness of Sister Moon and the stars was graciously regarded. Brother Wind, the clouds, and the air received his grateful acknowledgment of indebtedness. Sister Water was lauded for her usefulness, her humility, and her purity. Francis stood in awe before the beauty, joy, and strength of Brother Fire, who lightens the night. He saluted Mother Earth as the sustainer of life and the producer of diverse fruits, colorful flowers, and herbs. For all of these and more, Francis thanked his Lord, to whom, in his glory and honor, all were due.⁶³

In his love for creatures, Francis seemed to enter more rapturously into the company of God. Wholly wrapped up in the love of the Lord, he saw God's goodness not only in his own soul, but in every creature. Sister Lark was especially dear to him because of her sweet praises of God. Her very feathers, which were of the color of the earth, were examples to the brethren, who were thus admonished not to have delicate and colorful garments.⁶⁴ Every creature seemed to Francis to cry aloud: "God made me for thee, O man." Rejoicing in all things, Francis was so exalted that his spirit appeared to have left earth for heaven.⁶⁵

There was a double significance in all of this exaggerated personification of created things. Francis' symbolic inferences drawn from nature were but extraordinary examples of allegorical interpretations quite commonly entertained. He delighted, likewise, in the beauty and animation of bird, beast, and tree. His contemporaries were not completely without

⁶³ Spec. Perf., CXX; cf. the "Canticum fratris Solis," in Boehmer, *op. cit.*, p. 65; *Writings*, pp. 118-120. For discussions as to authenticity and for documents relating to the "Sun Song" cf. *Speculum Perfectionis* (Sabatier, 1898), pp. 277-291; Sabatier, Boehmer, and others regard this canticle as essentially a work of Francis. Its spirit at least is that of Francis.

⁶⁴ Spec. Perf., CXV, 9-11; CXIII.

⁶⁵ Spec. Perf., CXVIII.

regard for nature aside from its symbolic aspects. In their case, however, the allegorical appreciation generally outweighed a more spontaneous joy in living things. In Francis, the ecstasy of intimate converse with nature's children was bound up inextricably with the love for the Divine Creator, who had opened, to all, this paradise of vibrant beings, each with his own story and song.⁶⁶

Francis, with all of his astonishing simplicity and very average mentality, was not guilty of identifying God with nature. He knew how great were the differences between man and creatures and how immeasurably God towered above both. Yet in the true Catholicism of his mystical experience, he recognized the close relation of all created life. In its ultimate being, all that life had sprung into existence from the breath of God. Men, animals, and plants were not themselves God. They were united in one common family whose Father was God.⁶⁷

This lover of God believed that when men cast off artificial goods and came in like dependence with nature to the common table of Providence, they might at last know the surpassing happiness of union with the Lord. *The Little Flowers* gives a legendary, yet essentially true, background for such a union of man with God through poverty. Francis, with a few dry crusts, and brother Masseo, with a larger portion which his more striking personality had elicited, sat down to their mendicant repast. On a fair broad stone by a beautiful fountain, each friar laid the food which he had begged. Francis, seeing how Masseo's alms exceeded his own,

⁶⁶ Beaufreton, *St. François*, pp. 63-71.

⁶⁷ Chesterton contends, rightly, that Francis was not a lover of nature in the sense of accepting the "material universe as a vague environment, a sort of sentimental pantheism." He saw in all creatures the life which comes from God, but he did not view that creation as something vague and undifferentiated. He was not interested in some charming background, some pleasant abstraction called nature. He delighted in this beautiful flower, that full-throated lark, and yonder flowing stream, each with its own significant place in the fulfillment of the eternal destiny. Consult G. K. Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi* (New York, 1924), pp. 126-129.

broke out in praise of their treasures. Masseo failed to see any treasure in their great poverty, with such paucity of essential things. Here were neither house, tableware, nor servants. But Francis explained: "... this is what I hold to be a great treasure: where there is no dwelling made by human hands, but all is prepared for us by divine providence, even as is made manifest by the bread we have collected on this table of stone so fair and this fountain so clear. Therefore I desire that we pray unto God that He may make us love with our whole hearts this noble treasure of holy poverty that hath God for its servitor."⁶⁸

Though Francis felt himself to be all unworthy to possess such a treasure, he longed nevertheless for poverty, that celestial virtue by which every earthly and transitory thing was trodden under foot and by which every hindrance was removed from the soul that it might be united to the eternal God. He possessed this much-sought prize as he ate his dry crust with the benediction of nature's quiet eloquence. In these surroundings of natural beauty and with the sustenance which God extended to him with his own hand, Francis knew the same contentment as did the birds and the beasts, who accepted God's bounty as their sole support. This sylvan banquet of poverty, with the music of nature's harmony, was a sacramental feast in which God revealed himself to his poor.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Francis, or the writer who put this language into Francis' mouth, seems to have forgotten that the crusts which they had collected were prepared by human hands. *The Little Flowers* (XIII), p. 23.

⁶⁹ Actus, XIII, 21-22; Cuthbert, "St. Francis and Poverty," *Franciscan Essays*, pp. 19-23.

CHAPTER VIII

THE IDEAL OF POVERTY AND LIFE COMMUNITY

THE SENSE OF RELIGIOUS community was highly developed in Saint Francis. He felt himself a part of that fellowship which transcends, yet truly personalizes, the individual within the socializing unity of the ages. He could have said with a later Christian that the religious life is "essentially collective and transhistoric, essentially social and traditional."¹ He believed that neither geography, time, nor death itself could obstruct the spiritual communion of those who participate mutually in the love of God and his immortal family.

Poverty freed Francis and his friars from those divisive interests which separate men from each other and from their God.² Renunciation of selfish interests intensified their consciousness of fellowship with each other and with the members of God's church, militant, suffering, and triumphant. It challenged them to a new and free association with all life, natural, human, and supernatural.

Francis emphasized the need of true community of life within the poor fraternity. His friars were an elect, saving fellowship destined to share in God's eternal society. God alone was their father, and Christ was their sole master. They possessed the solidarity of men undivided by possessions or possessiveness. Their mutuality was daily being welded by the flames of divine love and the fires of persecution. Among them none might be called Prior. All must be

¹ E. Le Roy, *Le Problème de Dieu* (Paris, 1930), p. 325; see also pp. 326-327, 340 ff. Consult R. Will, *Le culte: étude d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* (Paris, 1935), Vol. III, for a valuable study of religious community.

² I Reg., 23.

Minors, humbly ready to wash each other's feet.³ Their familial obligations included loving response to each other's needs, whether physical or spiritual. The weaknesses of each challenged the compassion and reclamatory efforts of all. Firm discipline was necessary; but no one dared sit in self-righteous judgment of another.⁴ They were to "keep very secret the sin of their brother, for they that are healthy need not a physician, but they that are ill." Every wound inflicted upon an individual friar was an injury to their common body; it necessitated corporate healing.⁵

In the division of common labors some friars were called to assume the duties of leadership. These were exhorted to conduct themselves humbly as servants in poverty of the whole association. The brotherhood owed these ministering officials the obedient co-operation of men who renounced self for the common good. The secret of such affectionate reciprocity was the true poverty of selflessness—the Christ-like priority of ministry over lordship. In the Order and in the church at large the surrender of their wills was the proof of their living communion.⁶

This company of diverse personalities spread throughout the world was thus made one in their common poverty. Through it there developed an interpenetration of learned and unlearned, a reciprocal communication of the wise and the simple. In such a body all selfish preferences, whether of interests or associates, stood self-condemned. Francis even refused to choose those who should accompany him on his

³ I Reg., 22, 6.

⁴ II Reg., 6, 7, 10; De Conform., Fruct. IX, *Anal. Fran.*, IV, 415. Cf. Angelo Clareno's commentary on II Reg., 7, 10, in *Expos. Reg.*, Cap. VII, Oliger ed., pp. 182-183.

⁵ I Reg., 5; Epistola III: *Ad quendam Ministrum*, in *Opuscula*, pp. 108-110.

⁶ II Reg., 8; I Reg., 6; *Expos. Reg.*, Cap. VIII, Oliger ed., p. 191 and nn. Verb. Admon., 3; Julien de Spire, *Leg. Cap.* III, 20. Cf. I Reg., 1; II Reg., 1, 10.

journeys. He wanted no discrimination or singularity of any kind.⁷

The Friars learned rapidly from such a good example. Each assumed readily the consequences of his own misdeeds. All shared the common woes. But the brethren experienced common happiness, also. They joined freely in the returns of liberating poverty. So spontaneous and mutual was their joy that they sometimes found difficulty in exercising appropriate restraint.⁸ Above all, they rejoiced in their integrity as a group which voluntarily divested itself of all privilege for the sake of world service.⁹

The circle which bounded this brotherhood did not shut humanity out. The affection which they generated for each other expanded as it included men everywhere. Christ's way of poverty made them kin to all whom he loved. They were admonished to rejoice when conversing with "mean and despised persons, with the poor and the weak, with the infirm and lepers, and with those who beg in the streets." They themselves had occasion to seek alms. Such experiences brought them more realistically into the company of one who had lived and suffered among the poor.¹⁰ Their special service of Christ's ultimate kingdom required above all their ministry to sinful, sorrowing mankind.¹¹ The poor and the infirm were mirrors of the sufferings which Christ and his mother had known in their poverty.¹² Disregard for earth's

⁷ Consult II Cel., 180, 192, 144.

⁸ Thomas de Eccleston, *De adventu minorum in Angliam*, in *Anal. Fran.*, I, 227: "Fuerunt tamen fratres omni tempore inter se ita iocundi et laeti, ut vix in aspectu mutuo se temperarent a risu."

⁹ II Cel., 172; Spec. Perf., IV, XXVI; Leg. ant., 80.

¹⁰ I Reg., 9.

¹¹ Epist. ad fideles, 9; cf. De Conform., Fruct. XII, Pars Sec., caps. 17, 28, 33, in *Anal. Fran.*, IV, 611, 621-622; V, 626; Spec. Perf., XXVI; I Cel., 38.

¹² De Conform., Fruct., XII, Pars Sec., *Anal. Fran.*, IV, 630, quotes Bon., VIII, 5, as follows: "Dum pauperum vides, speculum tibi proponitur Domini et pauperis matris eius. In infirmis: similiter infirmitates, quas assumpsit, considera." Cf. Spec. Perf., XXXVII.

unfortunates cast dishonor on the Virgin and her Son. The company of men everywhere, and of the poor most obviously, was a society sprung from the divine bounty and sustained only by his mercy. In that community of life all were brothers because all were children of the same father. The sociality of Francis and his band was not that of superior, patronizing commiserators of the poor. It derived from the sense of integral communion with all men, who were dependents like themselves upon God's loving benevolence. The Friars' service was of special significance not because it removed them from the common life, but because it demonstrated in them the destiny willed by God for all repentant humanity. The Minors felt special kinship with the poor. This was not because of class preference or an animus toward the wealthy. It was, rather, because the poor suggested, if involuntarily, the complete dependence of all men upon God. They recalled one who had willingly become poor in order to demonstrate the riches available as much to the pauper as to the prince.¹³ These poor might even now rejoice, if they would, that He upon whom they so obviously depended would be more than sufficient for their temporal and eternal needs.¹⁴ Christ's poor men were sent to poor and rich alike to minister to all with complete unselfishness.

Upon Francis descended the mantle of the prophet, the robe of social responsibility. For him, as for Ezekiel, to fail in announcing to the wicked the error of his way was to be held guilty of the unrighteous man's blood.¹⁵ To follow in poverty after the Great Shepherd was to feed his sheep. The Friars were commissioned in the last times with freedom from earthly things in order that they might bring spiritual

¹³ E. Schlund, "Das christliche Sozialproblem und seine Franziskanische Lösung," in A. von Martin, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-83.

¹⁴ II Cel., 70: "Psalmos qui paupertatem sonant, ut illud: 'Patientia pauperum non peribit in finem,' et: 'Videant pauperes et laetentur,' ferventiore affectu et laetiore iubilo decantabat." Cf. Pss. 9:19, 68:33; Offic. Pass. Dom., in *Opuscula*, p. 145.

¹⁵ Spec. Perf., LIII; Ezech. 3:18.

liberty to shackled souls.¹⁶ They were not, in their practice of poverty, diminishing the public welfare. They were quite legitimately surrendering their selfish rights through the way of the Gospel that the common good might be amplified. Nothing could be more defensible, nothing more socially minded, than the search for that highest perfection which is the service of God and man through total renunciation, both spiritual and temporal.¹⁷

When Francis renounced parents and heritage, he became free as never before to identify himself with all humanity, to accept the legacy common to all God's children. He did not become poor to foster class antagonism. He became poor that he might the better free himself of proprietary divisiveness. As Father Cuthbert has so well perceived, "He became poor that he might become a man." Poverty was the liberty "to serve all the world for love," the right to love men as one of them, even as Christ had done.¹⁸

The poor life linked Francis in a fellowship of love with all humanity. It united him in beautiful association with that merciful advocate of mankind, the Virgin Mother of Christ.¹⁹ He adored her for her own sake and as the poor mother of the impoverished Jesus.²⁰ He regarded her as the

¹⁶ De Conform., Fructus XII, Pars Sec., *Anal. Fran.*, IV, 619, and sources there quoted.

¹⁷ See Hugo de Dina, *De Finibus Paupertatis*, AFH, V (1912), 280-281: "Nulli de universitate licitum est renunciare iuri suo in diminucionem rei publice sive communis boni; ergo, acontrario, cuilibet de universitate licitum est renunciare iuri suo in amplificacionem eiusdem."

¹⁸ "La Signification de la Pauvreté," *Ét. Fr.*, XXXVIII (1926), 483-484.

¹⁹ Bernard of Clairvaux addressed the Holy Virgin Mother in typical, medieval fashion: "Domina nostra, mediatrix nostra, advocata nostra, tuo Filio nos reconcilia, tuo Filio nos commenda, tuo Filio nos repraesenta." Sermon 2, de adventu Dom. n. 5, as reproduced by Fr. Conradi a Saxonia, *Speculum Beatae Mariae Virginis* (Bibliotheca Franciscana Ascetica Medii Aevi, t. II), 121.

²⁰ Félix Vernet, *La Spiritualité médiévale* (Paris, 1929), p. 95, says that in the Middle Ages devotion accorded the Blessed Virgin, the angels, and the saints, "est la conséquence de la dévotion à l'humanité du Christ." Cf. Bon., VII, 1.

protector of the brethren and sought her intercession with God, Son, and Paraclete.²¹ In the poor little church, St. Mary of the Angels, Francis first knew the regenerating spirit of poverty. Here the Order of Minors had its inception. In this, the Portiuncula, he always felt most intimately united with her sacrificial life and that of her Son. He loved this dwelling so highly suggestive of the Virgin's own surrender of will to human need and divine purpose. He wished it to remain the inspirational center of the Friars' existence and the sacramental focus of their apostolate.²²

Tradition declares that Francis sought from the Pope, in the name of Christ and his mother, an indulgence for sinners who might come in repentance as directed to this church of the Little Portion.²³ It is quite likely that in this holy place he felt closest to the Virgin, Jesus, and the angels. From it he proceeded in renunciation on his apostolate to lost souls. Legend attributes to Francis a sentiment regarding Christ's poor mother which he may easily have expressed. He is said to have declared that it was better, when necessity required, to strip the altar of the glorious Virgin and to maintain poverty, than to adorn her altar at the expense of the poverty which she loved.²⁴ Without doubt Francis revered her, not only as the glorious mother of Christ's voluntary poverty, but also as the defender of the Friars' gospel career.

As poverty led Francis into happy commerce with the Virgin Mother, so it conducted him into the vital presence of saints and angels. The renunciation which dedicated him to

²¹ See P. Ubald D'Alençon, *L'âme franciscaine*, pp. 96-97; II Cel., 198; I Reg., 23; Epist. ad fideles, 1; cf. *Salutatio Beatae Virginis*, in *Opuscula*, p. 123.

²² I Cel., 21-22; Bon., III, 1; Spec. Perf., LXXXII-LXXXIV, LV.

²³ Consult P. Sabatier (ed.), *Fratrisc Francisci Bartholi De Assisio Tractatus De Indulgentia S. Mariae De Portiuncula*, Collection d'études et de documents, t. II (Paris, 1900), esp. caps. 5 and 6, pp. 13-17. Sabatier attested the essentially Franciscan character of this work, whose genuineness has often been attacked. Cf. De Conform., Fruct., XIV, *Anal. Fran.*, V, 32-33, 54-55; Sabatier, *Vie* (1931), p. 264.

²⁴ Bon., VII, 4.

the Master made him a living member of Christ's spiritual body. Through the church and its sacraments, the Catholic Poverello experienced an active, participating community with the Christ. But to enter the society of Christ was to enjoy organic union with the body of His saints. Faith and life in the visible church brought inner contact with the invisible, heavenly church of the saints and angels. The desire for increasing community with these heavenly ones, now and hereafter, was decidedly in evidence in the thirteenth century.²⁵ Francis, especially, was blessed with a sense of companionship with personalities not limited to any given space or time. He entered through the church and its cult the society of those past and present. He participated in the glorious communion of the Father God, the Savior-Son, the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit, the Blessed Angels, and the Saints triumphant. The life which the Father gave, and in which Francis now communicated, comprised all that had been, now was, and ever should be. Saints and angels were all about him. He implored their aid and intoned their praises.

In his unworthiness, Francis called upon the celestial hosts to aid him in giving proper thanks to God Almighty. To such ends he implored the assistance of the whole angelic band and of the saints from time immemorial. To this impressive host and to the service of their God, Francis dedicated all the faithful, lay and ecclesiastical, male and female, rich and poor, young and old, married and single, sick and well.²⁶ In integral companionship with all of God's living children, Francis reached out in faith believing to touch the spiritual garments of the hosts celestial.

As the legends rightly show, Christ was first in Francis'

²⁵ Heiler, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-43. See U. Chevalier, *Poésie liturgique traditionnelle de l'église catholique en occident ou recueil d'hymnes et de proses usitées au moyen âge et distribuées suivant l'ordre de bréviaire et du missel* (Tournai, 1894), p. 120.

²⁶ For this unusual passage, see I Reg., 23.

affection. In Mary "after Christ he put his chief trust." Nevertheless, he evidenced pure affection for the angelic spirits, and gave them due meed of fast and prayer. For Michael, Archangel, whose office it was to present souls unto God, the poor servant of souls had unbounded love. To Peter, Paul, and all the saints he accorded the full outreach of his amazing devotion. These were for him the immortal reminder of how much one can offer to God if one retains nothing of self. To look upon them was to learn anew the joyous way of poverty. To renounce all was to associate with them in endless service of the Divine.²⁷

The special veneration which Francis accorded the angels was not a far-off reverence. He regarded them as guardians of human welfare. They were to him those "who walk with us amid the shadow of death. . . ." They were veritable companions, associates invisible, and friends invincible. Conduct in their presence must be circumspect. The praises in song which were due them must not suffer either in warmth or in wisdom.²⁸ Poverty of self gave access to their glorious protection. One devoid of earth's guarantees could put his hand in theirs and rest secure in their assurance of the divine love. He could commune in living association with the blessed of all ages.

The spiritual life of the Middle Ages was characterized by a tender devotion to the humanity of Christ. It emphasized particularly the Incarnation and the Passion. In Francis that devotion was the mainspring of existence.²⁹ It was for love of the Master that he had undertaken the poor life. Fellowship with Jesus, for himself and others, was the end

²⁷ Bon., IX, 3; II Cel., 197; De Conform., Fruct. XVI, *Anal. Fran.*, V, 121; Spec. Perf., XX. Cf. I Reg., 3; II Reg., 3; L. Wadding, *Annales Minorum* (25 vols., Rome, 1731-1886; new critical ed., Quaracchi, 1931), pp. 98-99, n. 86.

²⁸ II Cel., 197: "Angelos, qui nobiscum in acie sunt, quive nobiscum ambulant in medio umbræ mortis maximo venerabatur affectu. Tales ubique socios reverendos esse dicebat. . . ."

²⁹ Vernet, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-85; cf. D'Alençon, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-96.

for which he lived and served. Poverty such as Christ's early life involved was the pathway to inner companionship with Him. It was the means whereby one joined actively with the Savior in sacrificial ministration. To be poor as Christ was poor was to enter into his historical existence. It was to commune with his spirit in his present and future society.

To participate in the love with which Christ served was, first of all, to enter into the poverty with which he came to earth. Francis' constant preoccupation was with the humility of Christ's incarnation, with that voluntary renunciation of heavenly riches for the sufferings and impoverishment of earth. That was the boundless poverty which Francis must follow if he would commune with the Savior of men. To enter the divine kingdom Francis must become as a little child, as that certain little child who left a celestial kingdom to become a naked infant born in a stable. Francis felt rightly that if he could recapture the glories of that first poor birth, if he could look again into that Christmas manger, he could realize afresh the transforming powers of poverty. He could move forward with the Christ to his destined goal. Francis must be poor because his Lord had been poor—because his Christ had been born poor for the sake of men. It was in that spirit that he arranged at Greccio a simple dramatization of the events which were said to have transpired at the natal crib. He and the simple people in attendance marveled anew at the Lord's vicarious poverty.³⁰

Christ's whole life had evidenced the same redeeming poverty with which he had come to earth. In desert places, in a life devoid of ease and comfort, he had lived as he had been born and as he was later to die, a man self-deprived for

³⁰ I Cel., 84-87. See the beautiful appreciation by Father Robinson in *The Real St. Francis of Assisi* (2d ed.; London, 1904), pp. 32-33, for Francis' grasp of the Incarnation and its meaning. Compare Bernard of Clairvaux's devotion to the Nativity as discussed in P. Pourrat, *Christian Spirituality in the Middle Ages* (London, 1924), pp. 42 f. Cf. A. Maseron, *Les Franciscains* (Paris, 1932), pp. 239-240.

others' salvation. Francis knew with unerring discernment that he who would serve as Christ served, must live as he lived, must renounce as he renounced. Just as Francis reproduced in drama the poverty of the newborn infant, so he sought to incarnate in his daily experience the selflessness of Christ's earthly pilgrimage.³¹

Poverty brought Francis into inmost communion with his leader. It held him close to, bound him forever with, joined him in unassailable union with, the object of his transforming love.³² He could surely have had naught but approval for that poetic appreciation of a later follower for holy poverty: "Remember, O Lord Jesus, that Poverty is so much the queen of the virtues, that Thou, forsaking the dwelling place of the Angels, didst descend upon Earth in order to espouse her in Love Everlasting, and so as to bring forth in her, and by her, and through her, all the Children of Perfection. And she clung to Thee with such Fidelity, that even within Thy Mother's womb she paid Thee homage, for Thy Infant Body was, it is thought, the smallest of all. And at Thy Birth she received Thee in a Holy Manger and Stable; and in Thy Life upon Earth she so deprived Thee of all things, that Thou hadst no place where to lay Thy Head. And as a faithful Helpmeet she followed Thee loyally when Thou didst go forth to do battle for our Redemption, and in the Agony of the Passion she was Thy only Armour-bearer."³³

Poverty had attended the Christ at his birth and throughout his earthly life. It was strikingly manifested in his sacrificial passion and death. In that supreme renunciation, Christ gave up his very life that others might live. Francis' adherence to the way of poverty led him, therefore, into sacrificial communion with the all-surrendering Jesus. Poverty had

³¹ Bon., IX, 2.

³² De Conform., Fructus XVI, *Anal. Fran.*, V, 120: "Quintum dedit paupertas beato Francisco, scilicet intimitatem et coniunctionem cum Christo. Ipsa est glutinum, quo homo ligatur, iungitur, copulatur et cum Christo strictus tenetur."

³³ *The Lady Poverty*, pp. 185-187.

enabled the Master to save humanity and to make possible the ultimate kingdom. Poverty enabled Francis to be Christ's special servant for those same ends. He had entered the company of Jesus the poor child. He had associated himself inseparably with Jesus the poor man. He would follow through the poverty of the Cross the poor Savior, who laid down his life the better to take it up again. In the poverty of the Cross, Francis would find for himself and for others the liberating way of Christ to the Father.

M. Masseron is quite correct when he observes, "The cross is not for Francis solely an instrument of suffering and ignominy, it is also the symbol par excellence of poverty."³⁴ He would in this, as in all things, be conformed to the Christ crucified, who hung from the Cross, poor, grief-stricken, and naked.³⁵ The thought of Christ's passion never ceased to lift his spirit into the fellowship of Christ's suffering. His meditation upon the supreme sacrifice forever emphasized the necessity of his denying himself and assuming the Cross if he would truly follow the Crucified.³⁶ His absorption in the Cross was that of one who, in sorrowing ecstasy, re-enters the company of his resurrected Master. At such times Poverty was dearer than ever to Francis. It was, indeed, as he was purported by his later followers to have said, "the virtue . . . that companioned Christ on the cross; with Christ was buried; with Christ rose again, and with Christ ascended into heaven."³⁷

These rhapsodies upon the Passion which have been preserved by Francis' followers may not reproduce his words.

³⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 240. Note the cardinal importance of the Office of the Passion, *Opuscula*, pp. 126-148.

³⁵ Bon., XIV, 4: "Voluit certe per omnia Christo crucifixo esse conformis, qui pauper et dolens et nudus in cruce pendit."

³⁶ Bon., I, 5. Expos. Reg., cap. 1, Olier ed., pp. 22-27, celebrates the liberating way of poverty which rescues man from the trammels of earth and inducts him through the society of Christ's Passion into mysterious union with Him.

³⁷ II Cel., 127; *The Little Flowers*, XIII.

They cannot surpass the devotion which he offered Lady Poverty, that most intimate companion of Christ upon the Cross. For Francis, as for his disciples, poetry alone could do justice to his Lady. She it was who held the suffering Jesus in a close embrace; joined herself even more nearly to his agonies; supplied only the fewest and roughest of nails for his wounds; substituted the bitter cup for the single drop of water which he craved; and espoused him anew even as he yielded up the ghost. Poverty it was, also, who permitted to the Christ no tomb of his own. Wrapped close in his Lady's arms, he took naught of his borrowed garments from his borrowed tomb, but left all earthly things behind as he ascended to the eternal kingdom. Unto her he bequeathed the seal of Heaven's realm for the marking of the elect who might desire to walk in the way of perfection. Who indeed would not love Lady Poverty, who freed the Christ and his followers from all mundane diversions, who brought him and his in the fullness of unity into the eternal society of God?³⁸

In the joy of this perpetual association with his crucified Lord, Francis impressed upon the very garments of his followers the symbol of the Cross. It was fitting that these literal observers of Jesus' way should wear on their clothing the sign of the tree which proclaimed to the world the greatest triumph of ennobling poverty. Their garments, like their lives, must represent their scorn for the world and their love of poverty, even though it lead again *via dolorosa* to the Cross.³⁹

³⁸ See the whole of the "Prayer to Obtain Poverty," in Carmichael, *op. cit.*, Appendix I. The authenticity of its words can be and has been seriously questioned. The quality of its spirit cannot well be denied to Francis himself. Observe the close relation to the work of Ubertino da Casale, *Arbor Vitae Crucifixae Jesu* (Venice, 1485), Liber V, Cap. III, fol. 213 b. Consult also F. Callaey, *Étude sur Ubertain de Casale* (Louvain, 1911), pp. 101-105.

³⁹ Wadding, *Annales*, I, 54, in recapitulation of Angelo Clareno, *Hist. Sept. Trib.*, No. 7; cf. *Meditatio Pauperis in Solitudine Auctore Anonymo*

The symbol of Francis' devotion to Christ's Passion was found in his own Stigmata.⁴⁰ Whatever may have been the effect upon his body, his spirit witnessed visibly to its fellowship of suffering with Jesus. One might discuss with limited fruitfulness the moot points concerning the Stigmata. It would be folly to deny that Francis attained a singular companionship with Jesus through creative identification with his Passion. It would be futile, likewise, to contest the abundant evidence that Francis' whole personality was stamped with some discernible mark of the divine association.

The stories of the physical Stigmata have a significance far beyond that attached to them by caviling critics or the most credulous believers. They reflect, in addition to everything else, the impression made upon Francis' followers, immediate and more remote, by his obvious community with the suffering Christ. It is undeniable that when he more fully discerned the meaning of Christ's sacrificial suffering, Francis sustained a spiritual change of major proportions. That transformation was significant enough to give basis for countless legends, some of them conceivably quite exaggerated and even distorted as to detail. But behind them lay the historic truth greater even than the wonders of the physical wounds attributed to Francis. They reflect not the mere fabrication of superstitious followers, but a spiritual metamorphosis of the human soul greater than any physical accompaniment which may have attended it.⁴¹

Francis so aspired with his whole being unto oneness with

Saec. XIII, ed. P. F. M. De Lorme, *Bibliotheca Franciscana Ascetica Medii Aevi*, t. VII (Quaracchi, 1929), pp. 111, 133-134.

⁴⁰ Note the official account in Bon., XIII. See I Cel., 94-96, 90, 113-115; II Cel., 135-138; Tract. de Miraculis, 2-5; Tres Soc. (XVII), 69. For secondary materials on the Stigmata see the literature cited in L. Paetow, *A Guide to the Study of Medieval History* (New York, 1931), p. 257; and Heimbucher, *op. cit.*, I, 677.

⁴¹ Sabatier, *Études*, p. 308; H. Tileman, *Studien zur Individualität des Franziskus von Assisi* (Leipzig, 1914), p. 179; Cuthbert, *The Real St. Francis*, p. 32.

the crucified Jesus that he entered as nearly as humankind can enter into the likeness of the Lord himself. As Francis learned more experientially the character of the poverty which Christ exemplified on the Cross, he experienced the supreme liberty of associating most vitally with the Suffering Servant of the universe. He really knew the poor Christ crucified.

The Stigmata when properly interpreted become the indisputable evidence of that freedom in the divine company which poverty like Christ's own vouchsafed the Poverello. Poverty here, as always, meant total dispossession. The poverty involved in the Stigmata was the supreme detachment from self-seeking which cemented Francis' union with the all-renouncing Savior. It made him free to join the fully liberated Christ in His cosmic benefactions. Poverty was, as Cuthbert says, the freedom to serve all the world for love. It gave him the Lord's own freedom to serve with the Lord's own charity. The Stigmata represented the full flowering of that emancipation which had so long been forming in the Umbrian Saint.⁴² When he rose to the imitation of Christ's most sacrificial renunciation, he bore most nearly the divine image; he enjoyed most ecstatically the divine communion.⁴³

Poverty thus brought to Francis a unique association with the sufferings of Christ and his love for men. His body may well have borne, like his soul, some impress of the union which his whole being sustained with the suffering, dying, and redeeming Lord. With Christ he suffered and died to the world that he might help bring Christ's redemption to

⁴² The writer has been greatly aided in the foregoing by the suggestions of P. Cuthbert, "La Signification de la Pauvreté," *Ét. Fr.*, XXXVIII (1926), 485-487. He says of the Stigmata: "Ils déterminent à nos yeux, le caractère et le but de cette liberté que François gagna dans son amour de la pauvreté" (p. 487).

⁴³ See De Conform., Fructus XXI, *Anal. Fran.*, V, 395-396, for a highly imaginative appreciation of Francis' ultimate communion with Christ through the complete renunciation of the Stigmata.

the world. Christ's Calvary was his also. At Alverna, he shared likewise in Calvary's triumph.⁴⁴ As the image of the crucifix in St. Damian had once moved his soul, so now on Mt. Alverna the Cross of the living Christ rested full upon him.⁴⁵ In this last there was consummated the mysterious sweetness of the first.

The church of Francis and of later days emphasized through its sacraments the true community of religious life. Roman Catholic doctrine through the centuries has insisted quite properly upon the social character of the Eucharist. In the supernatural, as in the natural realm, the individual is not sufficient unto himself. He is a part of a larger unity. He shares in the common heritage of mankind. He participates as a living member of the *corpus mysticum* in the regenerating life of Christ, the head. Throughout the range of sacramental life, the individual becomes a true person through his incorporation into that divine society which is the church of God.

In the Eucharist, particularly, the socializing functions of the church are consummated. Here Christ, the mystical head of that living organism, the church, gives his Body and Blood for the renewed life and unity of his members. Out of him there flows the vitalizing energy through which men shall be redeemed and drawn unto himself. All those who communicate in the Eucharist participate in that timeless society whose life is God's and whose redemptive unity is the Lord's. In the sacrifice of the Mass, the believer joins himself to Christ and to the body of his church. He is no longer something alone and apart. He enters into the solidarity of the Christian whole. He becomes a vital member of that single Body which is Christ's.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Cuthbert, *op. cit.*, pp. 485-487.

⁴⁵ II Cel., 10, 11; Bon. II, 1; Gratien, *Saint François*, pp. 43 ff.

⁴⁶ On the subject of the foregoing see the illuminating section on "Le rôle social de l'eucharistie," *Eucharistia: encyclopédie populaire sur l'Eucharistie*, ed. Maurice Brillant (Paris, 1934), pp. 415 ff. A painstaking

Humbled and immolated on the altar, Christ dies anew for man's salvation. He reproduces in the sacrifice of the Mass, the sufferings of Calvary. Through the divine mysteries, the altar becomes a second crib of Bethlehem; the baby Jesus lives again in the poor little host. The supreme renunciation of the Christ is made available once more for the reconciliation of men with God and for the renewal of Christ's mystic communion in all ages. God reaches down to men; men reach upward to God. There is made possible an intimate commerce, a "mysterious communion of life and love between heaven and earth, between God and man."⁴⁷

Francis has been surpassed by few, if any, in his appreciation of this Eucharistic communion with Christ. The Mass was for him the supreme example of Christ's poverty and of its fructifying power. In this supreme renunciation the Son of God himself was reincarnated and was sacrificed anew for the salvation of men. The communion of man with God became an established, if mysterious, fact through the sacrificial life of the poor Son. Participation in his Eucharistic sacrifice joined the partakers in a community of life which included the present as well as the future, and welded the special servants of Christ with him into a corporate unity.⁴⁸

Poverty thus enabled Christ to make himself the redemptive resource of all men in all times. In unchanging unity and in immortal co-operation with Father and Holy Ghost, He united the natural and supernatural orders of being.⁴⁹ All who possessed the eye of faith and the heart of penitence might claim through the Eucharist the riches of Christ's sacrificial life. They might enter into his divine unity. It was the happy privilege of Christ's special followers in the

ing study is E. Mersch's *Le corps mystique du Christ* (2d ed., 2 vols.; Paris, 1936).

⁴⁷ For this and the paragraph preceding, see the valuable contribution of Gíhr, *op. cit.*, I, 205, 207, 218.

⁴⁸ D'Alençon, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-92; Epist. ad cap. gen., 1-2; Verb. Admon., 1.

⁴⁹ Epist. ad cap. gen., 3.

way of renunciation to enter his intimate fellowship and to conduct others into his eternal society. Poverty was for the Minors, as for their master, the way of that redemptive service. In such selfless dedication Francis and his companions could know fullest association with the Christ Incarnate, Crucified, and Life-Giving, as he appeared in the Holy Sacrifice.

The Christ, whose poor advent Francis celebrated at Greccio and whose renunciatory Passion he impressed upon his own person, was forever associated with the Poverello in the miracle of the altar. The poor Christ there took unto himself his follower in poverty.

Poverty brought Francis into communion with Divinity, and through it into a fellowship with all life. The more his renunciation freed him for association with God, the more he entered into sympathetic companionship with life in the visible world also. He felt no need to shun the visible creation in order to find communion with the world invisible. This creation was indeed "a book in which God revealed himself to man."

Francis came, especially after the experience of the Stigmata, to apprehend the "Kingdom of God in the works of the divine hand." All creation became a divine revelation and a spokesman of God's love for humanity. Something of the social character of all created life and of the solidarity of the whole universe, as it depended upon God, flooded into his spirit. Once more, as always, poverty was beloved because it was the way of liberty to that larger union in love "with God, with men, and with the created world."⁵⁰ Pilgrim in the world though he was, he saw in the world not merely those powers of evil that he fought, but the mirroring of God's life with which he sought communion.

⁵⁰ This whole section owes its central emphasis to the lucid observations of P. Cuthbert on "La Signification de la Pauvreté," *Ét. Fr.*, XXXVIII (1926), 486-487.

The medieval Christian did not believe that the eternal blessedness to which he looked forward was to be a purely individual experience. He anticipated membership in the society of the just, where each should be bound to all by the bonds of a common blessedness. He would there take his place in a community vaster and more enduring than the human one in which he now participated. This society incorporated saved humanity from among all peoples in all times. It would constitute the divinely fashioned city of God, celestial. There men would enjoy not only the companionship with each other, but the familial society, also, of Christ, God, and his angels. This would be no merely human community but "a republic of man under God," a blessed society wherein men lived freely under the laws of the divine Sovereign.⁵¹

The Assisan possessed to a remarkable degree this appreciation of life community in the eternal society of the transcendent kingdom. It was for the coming of that everlasting community that Francis besought the Lord when he prayed: "Thy Kingdom come, that Thou . . . mayest make us come to Thy kingdom, where there is the clear vision of Thee, the perfect love of Thee, the blessed company of Thee, the eternal enjoyment of Thee."⁵² God in heaven was already infusing into saints and angels the light and love which were his. The Father was the creative, vitalizing force in an ever-growing, divine society. The final membership in this community would ere long be established. Then the complete beatitude which God reserved for his saints would be revealed. There could be no selfish exaltation of the individual in that day. All would be members of one divine

⁵¹ See the inspiring discussion of the divine community of life, in E. Gilson, *L'esprit de la philosophie médiévale* (Paris, 1932), pp. 185-186.

⁵² The "Expositio beati patris super orationem Dominicam," *Opuscula*, p. 120: "*Adveniat regnum tuum . . . ubi est tui visio manifesta, tui dilectio perfecta, tui societas beata, tui fructio sempiterna*"; Robinson, *Writings*, p. 140.

body. The true life of the immortal person would be nourished in the one society of the blessed with their God.

Francis declared that all men of this world, himself included, were sinners. In preparation for celestial citizenship he invoked divine pardon: "And forgive us our trespasses; by thy ineffable mercy in virtue of the Passion of Thy Beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and through the merits and intercession of the most Blessed Virgin Mary and of all Thy elect."⁵³ He petitioned that Christ and the Holy Spirit might give thanks to God on the part of unworthy humanity. He also asked that thanksgiving might be offered to the Lord by all the blessed of the ages in the ways which they saw most fit. These happy ones embraced in their society: Mary, the Angels, the Spirits, John the Baptist, Evangelists, Apostles, Prophets, Innocents, Martyrs, Confessors, Virgins, Elias and Enoch, and all the Saints, past, present, and future.⁵⁴

Inspired by his growing communion with this society of heaven, Francis then turned to living humanity with which he was also integrated. He and his humble friars called for penitence and true faith without which none was able to be saved. He summoned to such Catholic faithfulness and to entrance into the heavenly society "all those within the holy Catholic and Apostolic Church wishing to serve God, and all ecclesiastical Orders, priests, deacons, subdeacons, acolytes, exorcists, lectors, door keepers, and all clerics; all religious men and women, all boys and children, poor and needy, kings and princes, laborers, husbandmen, servants and masters, all virgins, continent and married people, laics, men and women, all infants, youths, young men and old, healthy and sick, all small and great, and all peoples, clans, tribes,

⁵³ *Opuscula*, p. 121; Robinson, *Writings*, p. 140.

⁵⁴ I Reg., 23: ". . . et omnes sanctos, qui fuerunt et erunt et sunt. . . ."

and tongues, all nations and all men in all the earth, who are and shall be. . . ."⁵⁵

Francis acknowledged his sins in the presence of that whole community of life, human and divine, with which he sought an ever closer fellowship. He confessed all his sins to God, Christ, and the Holy Ghost; to the saints in heaven and on earth; to the minister-general and priests of the Order; and to all other blessed brethren.⁵⁶ His was a remarkable sense of that solidarity which invests the common life of men in God, now and hereafter.

Those words of Francis' later followers might fittingly have risen to his own lips: "Yea! this [Poverty] is that celestial virtue whereby all earthly and transitory things are trodden under foot and whereby every hindrance is removed from the soul that she may be freely conjoined with the eternal God. This is the virtue that maketh the soul, while yet on earth, have communion with the angels of heaven. . . . It is this virtue also that easeth the flight into heaven of those souls that love it; for it guards the armour of true humility and charity."⁵⁷ Poverty was the special way of a few who followed Christ in unquestioning service. It led them and others, through their renunciatory sacrifices, into a community of faith in the present and into the eternal society of God's redeemed throughout the living future. There they should know the church triumphant; join saved humanity in everlasting worship; be united with the saints in blessedness; associate with the angels in praise; thank the merciful Virgin in joy; love Christ in his glory; and adore forever the Lord God in majesty. This community of life would be the society of all societies, the city of everlasting life, the kingdom transcendent.

⁵⁵ I Reg., 23 (Robinson, tr., *Writings*, pp. 60-64): ". . . omnes nationes et omnes homines ubique terrarum, qui sunt et erunt. . . ."

⁵⁶ Epist. ad cap. gen., 5.

⁵⁷ *The Little Flowers*, XIII.

CHAPTER IX

POVERTY AND WORLD APOSTOLATE

POVERTY as Francis practiced it did not for long enjoy the unqualified support of the Franciscan Order. Francis himself pursued an ideal beyond the reach of all but a few men. He permitted individuals of all kinds to join him in his life of renunciation. Mounting numbers and the growth of diverse interpretations of poverty forced him to lean more heavily upon the organizing power and administrative wisdom of the church.

By permitting the brethren to be molded into a formal order with the rules and restrictions which Rome imposed, Francis insured the outward success of his movement. At the same time, he invited modifications whose logical ends were not wholly in keeping with his ideal. He had effected a remarkable synthesis of his devotion to poverty, his ministry to men, and his loyalty to the church. He asked the impossible, however, when he demanded that his followers observe strictest poverty and, at the same time, advance the church's program with which that poverty interfered.

Francis thus caused his ideal to become the occasion for its own defeat. In permitting its extended application under the guidance of practical churchmanship, he made inevitable its modification at the hands of his own followers. They were sent out to evangelize the whole world, yet they were denied the mental and physical equipment which the times demanded. He exhorted them to serve Mother Church but proscribed the intellectual preparation and the material necessities without which they could not answer her call. The transformation of the ideal which resulted was the product neither of the church's deceit nor of the Friars' disloyalty.

It was the consequence of subjecting fragile idealism to the rough shock of daily realities.¹

With the compromise Rule of 1223, in whose construction Cardinal Ugolini probably aided materially, the Franciscan movement accelerated its passage from the region of pure ideal into the storm and stress of the world's actual life.² The trend of affairs was now in the direction of a more extensive program of formal apostolate under the guidance and protection of the church. Such a program would involve ere long the erection of larger, more stable quarters for the Friars. In giving more attention to study, they would be permitted less time for labor and would be tempted to have undue recourse to alms. The purity and vigor of primitive poverty would one day be seriously compromised at their hands.³

One may exaggerate the facts in depicting Francis' last years as given over wholly to misery and wretchedness, occasioned by quarreling factions and the betrayal of poverty. There was as yet no real crystallization of parties; there was no betrayal of poverty, but rather an inevitable modification of it which Francis may well have found difficulty in bearing. His Testament was doubtless a plea to preserve the real spirit and truth of poverty in the face of dangerous modifications and of temptations to laxity. There is no likelihood, however, that he indicted Mother Church for inaugurating or accelerating the trend toward a modified renunciation. The disturbing transition to laxity served to make him ever more conscious of his own failures. Deeper than any outward concern must have been his inner assurance that the church

¹ The relation of Francis' ideal to problems of his apostolate is discussed in G. G. Coulton, "The Failure of the Friars," *Hibbert Journal*, V (1907), 296-308; Cuthbert, *The Friars and How They Came to England* (London, 1903), pp. 51-67. See Gratien, *Histoire*, in detail.

² Beaufreton, *op. cit.*, pp. 221-223; Balthasar, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

³ Balthasar, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-17, 28; H. E. Goad, "The Dilemma of St. Francis and the Two Traditions," *Essays in Commemoration*, pp. 129-165, esp. 142-143; Holzapfel, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.

which was Christ's minister could not fail, at last, to be the true protector of Jesus' poverty.

Not long after Francis' death, however, divergent views with regard to poverty began to be characteristic of groups which matured in time into hostile parties. One group later known as the Zealots, or Spirituals, insisted on the strictest renunciation in conformity with the Rule and Testament. Another group, more representative of the general community, argued for a modified observance in keeping with changing circumstances and the progress in social usefulness of a growing membership of complex needs.

In the bull *Quo elongati a saeculo* of September 28, 1230, Pope Gregory IX declared that the Testament was not binding. Although prohibiting ownership by the Friars, individually or in common, it enabled them to buy and pay for necessary things through a *nuncius*. Though appointed by the Friars, this *nuncius* was to be considered the agent of the person who supplied the necessary funds. It was to be understood that under this arrangement the Friars really had nothing but the use of most necessary things.⁴

This papal interpretation was but the beginning of a series of decisions which permitted the brethren to lapse gradually from an ideal whose literal observance, if required of the growing order at large, must have compromised its very existence. Elias' generalate (1232-1239), which was marked by real progress in many lines, made possible the growth of resources wholly out of keeping with earlier poverty. A period of Zealot opportunity under the saintly John of Parma (1247-1257) was marred by the outbreak of distorted versions of Joachimite literature with a subsequent scandal which unseated John. Bonaventura, as minister-general

⁴ J. H. Sbaralea (ed.), *Bullarium Franciscanum* (Rome, 1759), I, 68-70. For this bull and its interpretation see esp. Spec. Perf. (Sabatier ed., 1898), p. 314; A. G. F. Howell, *S. Bernardino of Siena* (London, 1913), pp. 7-10; D. S. Muzzey, *The Spiritual Franciscans* (New York, 1907), pp. 7-13; Gratien, *Histoire*, pp. 117-119.

(1257-1274), sought vainly to check the very real laxity of many members of the Community. His policy of moderation failed, likewise, to temper the ill-timed denunciation of the Community by the Zealots.

Subsequent attempts were made by popes and generals of the thirteenth century to adapt the ideal to existing conditions and to conciliate hostile factions. They succeeded only in fortifying the majority in a rather lax interpretation and in further arousing the fanatical opposition of the Zealots, whose extremes brought upon them the persecution of the Community.

Pierre Jean Olivi, Angelo de Clareno, and Ubertino da Casale headed Zealot groups of varying influence in Provence, Central and South Italy, and in Tuscany. Compromise decisions, such as that of the Council of Vienna in 1312, permitted both enemy parties to claim the victory. Zealot pleas to be allowed an order apart were hotly rejected by the Community as involving claims to superior holiness. Persecution met the heroic but antagonistic contentions of the Zealots for a life of primitive poverty.

The Community brought serious indictment of the Spirituals before Pope John XXII. This pope, seeing the implications of Zealot doctrine for fanaticism and ecclesiastical disruption, brutally sacrificed justice to expediency; ordered the Zealots to give obedience to the Order; and, not stopping at bloodshed, virtually crushed them and their strict observance (*ca.* 1317-1322).

The greater portion of the Order, including many of the less radical Zealots, chose to conform to the papal policy and to the official interpretation of the Rule. Others like the Fraticelli, who had once been a beloved band of Tuscan Spirituals, drifted off into open revolt or became lost in a maze of heresies. Those friars who found it easy to follow John XXII's dictates developed, in time, into the group known as Conventuals. Others who, without rebellion,

sought a reversion to the *poor life* received permission in 1334 to form a movement of stricter observance. Revived in 1368, after a lapse of years, it prospered under the leadership of Bernardino of Siena and John of Capistrano. It spread gradually to many lands. In 1517 Pope Leo X, despairing of unity, permitted the Observants and associated reforms to form one order, and the Conventuals another. Subsequent centuries saw the rise of still other reform bodies who, like the Capuchins, sought a purer interpretation of the ideal.⁵

Francis' ideal, therefore, became in time the occasion of strife and ruin as well as the way of peace and salvation. He shares the blame with both parties who contended, often violently and with little of his spirit, for their own interpretation of his exacting mission. The wisest counsels of moderation were unable to conciliate these groups, both of which contained many good but misguided men. The futile attempt of Church and Order to impose authority and unity resulted, too often, in hypocritical evasion, persecution, and bitterness. Peace and the honorable observance of Franciscan

⁵ For the long and involved history of the Order after Francis' death see the relatively unprejudiced accounts in Sessevalle, *op. cit.*; Gratien, *Histoire*; Scudder, *op. cit.*; T. Ferré, *Histoire de l'Ordre de Saint François* (Rennes, 1921); Howell, *op. cit.*; A. G. Little, *Studies in English Franciscan History* (Manchester, 1917). Consult also the Introductions by Brewer and Howlett in *Monumenta Franciscana*, I-II (Rolls Series IV¹, IV²). For the poverty issue and the history of the Spirituals see Muzzey, *op. cit.*, Balthasar, *op. cit.*, and the valuable articles and editions of sources by F. Ehrle, "Die Spiritualen u. ihr Verhältnis zum Franziskanerorden und zu den Fraticellen," and other articles in *Archiv für Literatur- und Kirchengeschichte des Mittelalters*, I, 509-569; II, 106-336, 353-416, 653-669; III, 1-195, 409-553, 553-623; IV, 1-190.

Varying appreciations of the ideal of poverty in relation to other Franciscan emphases are presented in D'Alençon, *L'âme franciscaine*, and *Leçons de l'histoire franciscaine* (Paris, 1918), pp. 8-9, 22-35; René de Nantes, *Histoire des Spirituels dans l'Ordre de Saint François* (Paris, 1909), pp. 1-20; A. Masseron, *Les Franciscains* (Paris, 1932); Pio Pecchiai, *S. Francesco d'Assisi e la missione della povertà* (Milano, 1926); Gratien, *St. François*, pp. 46-50; Scudder, *op. cit.*; Father Dunstan, *Franciscan Poverty*, pp. 531-537; P. Cowley, *Franciscan Rise and Fall* (London, 1933); A. Gemelli, *Le message de Saint François d'Assise au monde moderne* (Paris, 1935).

ideals according to varying interpretations waited upon an honest division too long deferred. Each group under conditions of reasonable opportunity has proved to the world the potentialities and blessings, as well as the limitation and failure, of Francis' versatile idealism.

One emerges from a study of Francis' apostolate with certain definite convictions as to its limitation and failure. With all of his charm and unselfishness, Francis must, nonetheless, be appreciated as a man of passionate impulses, sustained, often illogical conclusions, and simple, unsophisticated mentality. The same ideal which gave him charm and magnetism also filled him with fanciful notions and fatuous obsessions.

Francis should, of course, be judged in the light of his own day with its characteristic extremes of temperament and action. His career, however, was filled with inconsistencies, affronts to purely rational processes, and naïve attachment to absolute ideals, sufficient to stir the resentment as well as the admiration of any age. If it is unjust to evaluate his life and thought according to modern standards of judgment, it is likewise shallow to invest him with a halo of perfection.

The extremes of self-depreciation, bodily abuse, and neurotic seizure to which Francis was addicted gave an unwholesome atmosphere to much of his poverty observance. The lengths to which he went in the attainment of abject humility may be seen from his association with lepers whose putrefying sores he did not hesitate to kiss. His pride in the suspension of critical faculties was a tribute to his thoroughgoing devotion to poverty and an evidence of his suspicion of things intellectual. Virtual ignorance was not too high a price for him to exact of the purchasers of poverty. There are times when his infatuation with the ideal seems wholly severed from any thought of its practical application to normal living.

Francis must be accorded full honors for having divested

himself of all proprietary ambitions. His ideal in its pristine absolutism, however, must be evaluated as an uncompromising, if inspiring, discipline realizable by a very few people in any place or time. One may sincerely admire Francis' attempt to place the regard for spiritual values above the consideration for material acquirements. Criticism must be leveled at his failure to make his ideal accessible to the men in whom he had aroused a longing for the power which attends renunciation. The transformation of that ideal within the Franciscan Order was not the product of a betrayal by his followers; it was the natural consequence of applying to complex, group life an ideal evolved for his own individual needs, and impossible of success in any society organized on a proprietary basis.

It is true that Francis had not originally intended his ideal to be expressed through a highly institutionalized order; nor had he made it an occasion for criticism of the social structure in general. To have been consistent with the original demands of his ideal, he would have had to restrict the individualistic witness which it required to a few select souls fitted for the observance of absolute poverty. This he did not have the heart to do, for he really wanted all men who so desired to know the potent charm of poverty. He might have modified the ideal to suit the gradual progress of large numbers in the way of renunciation. This he would not do, for he was too much of an idealist to be content with the slow evolution of normal, social progress. He might, conceivably, have advanced a constructive criticism of existing society by way of preparation for a new day of shared resources moderately used for the common good. This he could hardly have been expected to do, for he had not the foresight, constructive genius, or predispositions of a modern social prophet. What is more pertinent, he did not envisage his primary service of poverty to be one of humanistic emphases

upon social reordering. His first dedication—and that of poverty—was to the ultimate order from which all social blessings, present and future, must proceed.

As one author views it, there was something illogical in positing an ideal of perfection through poverty, and, at the same time, accepting a nominally Christian society based on opposite principles—a society in which the widespread application of poverty was folly, as Franciscan history proved. This is essentially what Francis seems to have attempted. He held up an ideal of perfection which appealed to thousands; but he made no constructive criticism of a society which rendered the high adventure of renunciation possible only to a few. Perhaps the reason was that he felt the call—the vocation of a select few—to herald the near approach of a supermundane society. His mistake in that case would consist in his not having prevented more ably that multiplication of numbers which was to distort the peculiar function of his *little flock*.⁶

Francis did not envisage all men giving up their property or entering fully into the life of poverty. It is true that his friars “never caught the vision of an entire civilization reclaimed from passion for the *Proprium*, they never realized the full implications of their doctrine, their ideal was never socialized. The thought that all wealth could be purified by being turned into a common store never dawned on their minds.” Experimentation with Francis’ conception showed how inadequate must be any individualistic solution of the social problem.⁷ It is not fair, however, to see in the fate of his ideal the inevitable failure of a sheerly individual attempt to solve a social problem. He was not proposing any panacea, least of all his own, for the ills of current society. He was proclaiming, rather, the divine standard of judgment for that society. He was the harbinger of a society yet

⁶ See Scudder, *op. cit.*, pp. 362-366, for pertinent observations on the whole matter.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 396, 366.

to come. Like his Master, he attempted to live *now* the ideals *then* to be actualized. His real service to the present derived from his attachment to the future. He did not foresee a temporal society developing into a transcendent one. His patterns were those of cataclysm, not of evolution.

After all, the adoption of Francis' ideal was largely limited to those who would, and could, follow his highly individualized imitation of the Christ. The standard which he bore on high was not the banner of a moderate renunciation progressively adapted to social needs. It was not unfurled, primarily, with a view to equalizing human opportunity and inducting all mankind into the joys of a co-operative commonwealth. It has been sufficiently demonstrated that his ideal was, first of all, the uncompromising and literal adherence to what he believed to be the poverty of Christ. It may be that Francis imitated too mechanically in his own thirteenth century the recorded applications which Jesus gave his ideals in the first. He may have benefited too little from a sympathetic appreciation, like that of his Master, of what the effective sterilization of acquisitive desires would require in his own day. In any case, he scorned the easy way of rationalization. He did not denature Jesus' absolutism into a reasonable program of social improvement won by practical compromise. It is possible that he missed the point and exaggerated Jesus' emphasis upon occasion.

Francis was most literal in his interpretation of Christ's poverty and of gospel renunciation. He sought poverty because Christ had loved it; he reproduced with stark, exaggerated realism Christ's association with it. The Poverello permitted himself none of the deviations from a well-nigh inhuman standard which his essential moderation sometimes allowed his followers; he observed literally Christ's injunction to absolute poverty. He did not have equal regard for the cases in which Christ modified an inclusive requirement to suit specific needs. In his zeal to imitate the poverty which

Christ commanded, Francis even exceeded the poverty which Christ lived. The Saint was not always consistent with his own admonition to follow the Scriptures less by a literal interpretation of the text than by reference to the word and example of Christ.

Francis' attitude to money was an exaggerated one throughout. He observed literally the Master's injunctions that were directed against it (Matt. 10:9). He was ignorant of, or at least did not observe, Jesus' policy of utilizing money when occasion demanded (Matt. 17:25-27). Indeed, tradition has it that Francis resorted to the tactics of a stowaway when passage on a boat was denied him because he lacked money.⁸ His execration of money before his friars revealed an attitude surpassing the limits of sound sense and largely devoid of beneficial results for society in general. In spite of his dramatic illustrations of the pernicious character of money, capitalism continued to be a growing force in Italy. Italian usurers and merchant princes thrived when the Friars were most numerous. Francis' own brotherhood not only challenged the senseless deification of mere possession, but it also staged "the spectacle of idleness and hypocrisy masquerading as self-denial."⁹

The harsh literalism of the poverty which Francis laid down may seem less courageous than the life of poverty through detachment. The individual who practices detachment must, while making moderate use of things, hold himself free from insidious, acquisitive lures; he must surrender without regret that which he has dared to use without desire. Such an ideal substitutes for complete severance from material possession a concentration on nobler things without discarding things useful but less good. Francis sought to free his brethren from the added burden of rising superior to material things without cutting themselves free from phys-

⁸ Bon., IX, 5; A. de Serent, "L'âme franciscaine," AFH, VIII (1915), 450-451.

⁹ Coulton, *Five Centuries*, II, 133.

ical possession. Yet the life of complete dispossession as he demanded it proved to have temptations still too potent for the average man. It gave no thought to an ideal which, if realized, would preclude selfish aggrandizement in the world at large through the more equal sharing of certain resources indispensable to the common good.¹⁰

The unqualified application of Francis' ideal was quite difficult and of mixed benefit to the few. His appeal to rise above the material has roused the longings of the many for a purer, less selfish life. To leaders quite different in qualities from Francis must fall the task of creating a new social order which will translate those longings into practical action. The attainment of such a social order will be as impossible of immediate achievement as was Francis' ideal for the supremacy of spiritual life through individual and social renunciation. Its approximate fulfillment, when secured, will not be independent of the slow-moving forces of social evolution which Francis' way of life held secondary. It is certain that no program of social service can afford to neglect that dedication to the ultimate which was so richly productive of humanitarian concern in Francis.

Francis, it is true, gives us little direct help in the creation of a society which will combine the controlled utilization of things for the common good, with a deliverance from materialistic passions and their systematic exploitation. To him we can turn for new light on the transcendent forces of the human spirit freed from the dominance of secondary goods.

Francis' life remains an inspiration to those who labor for a new society in which individuals shall be valued more for what they are than for what they have.¹¹ He must be credited with having contributed to man's vague uneasiness with artificial attractions that threaten to lure him from life's

¹⁰ See Nicholson, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-128, and Serent, *op. cit.*, pp. 464-466, for the relative merits of literal poverty and detachment.

¹¹ W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York, 1902), p. 317.

realities. Francis sensed deeply, though he could never have explained clearly, that frustration which comes with a career of getting, keeping, and multiplying things. Somehow he knew that the more one gets, the less satisfaction there is to be had outside of getting. He divined that the more one's satisfaction depends upon having more than others can have, the less capable one is of enjoying things given to all in common.¹² When such a state has been reached, financial power is more highly prized than is the ability to engender the ideas or to direct the endeavors that will insure the salvation of mankind. The passion to monopolize material resources then transcends the desire to master secrets of the universe for the sake of human progress. The maintenance of social dominance becomes more important than the cultivation of human brotherhood throughout the earth.

Without a word of treason against the sanctity of things that be, Francis made it perpetually embarrassing for a few men to enjoy rights and to wield powers made possible by the deprivation of the many. Whatever his public utterances may have been, his public and private life was an implied criticism of all proprietorship which deprives others of a happy livelihood and steals from the possessor his heritage of freedom, power, and joy.

Like Francis, the truly well-born have always been prouder of that which they are than of those physical things which accrue to them. The individual who has nothing to recommend him but wealth and social position may well feel humble in the presence of the man who gives himself to the world through the honest labor of his hands or the immortal creations of his mind. Sensitive souls to whom wealth has been intrusted and by whom it has been conscientiously administered are often keenly aware of the penalties which

¹² E. Renan, *Nouvelles études d'histoire religieuse* (Paris, 1884), pp. 336-337.

their riches impose, of the moral cowardice which position may entail.

No soul can know the stuff of which it is made until, without other resource or privilege, it depends on God and itself alone.¹³ By his own example Francis quickened, within every man, that latent nobility which remembers honestly the utter nakedness with which it entered the world, and which determines courageously to wage a fair battle for personal development without advantage over its fellows. His sacrifice still shames the cowardice which refuses to commit itself to a cause out of fear of the social penalties involved and which shuns a worthy calling whose rewards are financially unimpressive. Francis' courage has never failed to arouse the envy and to evoke the emulation of those greater souls whose lives of unrequited service demand all the discipline of military fitness, but whose exploits are cheered by no applauding crowds.¹⁴ His mad dream still haunts an age in which people of great wealth and little else can nod with condescending patronage to the ministers of spirit and intellect. His scorn for riches gives us pause at a time when money is exalted into the supreme end of life, instead of being made a simple means of social convenience.¹⁵

Francis' individual theories and practices seem absurdly impracticable in our age of subjection to the machine. Our day is heedless of that "sentimental nonsense" which puts moral power above industrial efficiency and which exalts religious idealism above practical considerations. It has no time for the history of man's spiritual struggles and of his abiding needs. It is contemptuous of any culture that money cannot erect and which mass production cannot supply in quantity.

Yet Francis quickened a longing that machines cannot fill. He left his name written higher than our pillars of struc-

¹³ James, *op. cit.*, pp. 317-321.

¹⁴ See James, *op. cit.*, pp. 367-369, for a remarkable tribute to the value of poverty and the moral fighting shape as contrasted with the emasculating powers of wealth and privilege.

¹⁵ Beaufreton, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-121.

tural steel. His career is a contention that there are some treasures safe from the clutches of the *nouveaux riches*. There are places where a money economy breaks down. Man is unable to set a price upon the love of neighbor. He cannot purchase the association of those personal forces in God's universe that make for a new heaven and a new earth. He is helpless to buy his way into the company of Christ, the supreme adventurer into the realm of personal fulfillment. These are things that money cannot purchase, that a soul stripped for action alone can experience.¹⁶

Francis' ideal, overwhelmed in every encounter with practical circumstances during seven hundred years, can still prick the cheap vanities of a civilization deceived by material successes. His dream, which faded centuries ago, still projects itself into the consciousness of those modern prophets who proclaim social righteousness and greater equity among men. His soul was filled with intense longings for man's release from the tyranny of possession. Those longings may, by some transmigration of spiritual forces, be born again unto abler fulfillment in the Commonwealth toward which we strive. A man sincere enough in his beliefs to stake his life on their expression, and daring enough in his actions to challenge the impossibilities of all ages, may, by the very disagreement which he engenders, provoke others to services that he himself cannot render. In Francis' magnificent abandon and in his genuine self-sacrifice lives an inspiration that is cumulative throughout the centuries. His was an ideal which, in spite of all its limitations, was pregnant with immortal energies for the struggle toward man's better day.

The ideal of poverty and its apostolate continue to elicit the scorn of those unimaginative souls who pride themselves on being practical and realistic. They contemptuously reject Francis as "no economist."¹⁷ The most secularized Christian,

¹⁶ Renan, *Nouvelles études*, pp. 335-339; Renan, *Vie de Jesus* (12th ed.; Paris, 1863), p. 184.

¹⁷ Cf. Sabatier's reference to this group in *Études*, pp. 26, 29.

however, must admit that there may be some worths which transcend those of contemporary economics. The Poverello was, and still remains, a "voice crying in the wilderness," a true Christian prophet of transcendent values. As such, he elicits a continuing and, perhaps, even a growing response in generations subsequent to his own.

Francis never claimed to make the service of any current society or of its interests the major purpose of his life. He devoted himself unreservedly to that higher practicality and to that superior realism which inheres in Jesus and in his kingdom. His attachment to those absolute ideals of Christ yet to be actualized made him the social blessing that he was. Renunciation emancipated him for loyalty to that larger life which *ought* to be and which, in God's own time, *will* be. By his faith in the ultimate he was all the more consecrated to the needs of the world which now exists.

He welcomed poverty as the symbol of that dedication which interests itself in the present but transcends this existence with an immeasurably greater life. Renunciation was the key to that experience of Christ in the Gospel which gave itself for contemporary humanity, but always for divine ends. Those purposes transcended anything solely human or merely current. Christians have at times dreamed of creating a social order so cumulative in its developments that considerations of a superhuman and supernatural future may safely be dispensed with. But there lingers in Christian tradition the stubborn conviction of Francis that everything here should sing of pilgrimage and exile. Perhaps he best serves our day by his insistence that humanity must broaden its cosmic outlook; that human co-operation, with all of its real importance, must subordinate itself to the divine leadership of the ultimate kingdom.

In an age of growing secularism and of economic totalitarianism, Francis sounded a note of independence for Christianity and for the church. Christianity was once more to be

the religion of Christ. Its values were to be centered upon God in his redemption of man, individual and social. The church was to be served as the only institution which could provide a community of love, and which could dispense the sacramental graces of the Divine. By such means, man was ministered to in his pilgrimage to the true kingdom of God. Poverty freed Francis for joyous service to all of God's children and to the kingdom, which was to be their true home.

In our age, when even the church seems tottering upon the edge of capitulation to the secular and to the coercive, Francis may well have a word about true Christian liberty. He may even suggest the urgency of something more vital than a culture which is economically and politically aggressive. If that should ever come to be, his naïve association of voluntary poverty, peace, and love would take on new significance. His emphasis upon renunciation could no longer be dismissed as a misguided and impracticable idealism. His message might even be found to be in some measure what he proclaimed it; namely, an invocation of Jesus' ministry to humanity through that which is divine. Social progress would then need to be sought and supported by the fullest energies with which man's age-long history has endowed him. But the initiating power and the consummating resources of the ultimate order would not be lost sight of. The Christian church could then recover its independence of all things secular through its dedication of everything temporal to transcendent ends. Christendom can afford, at whatever cost, to consecrate itself, and humanity with it, to those eternal purposes which Francis served. The only true social program for the present, as well as for the future, will thus be insured.

The attachment of Francis for Jesus was manifestly something more than the naïveté of a simple peasant. He glimpsed the inexhaustible riches of an ever-living spirit. The *little man* employed defective exegesis of the Scripture.

He had a temperamental incapacity which would have unfitted him for the critical method, even had it existed. Nevertheless, he understood the real Christ. He found the uncompromising Jesus and the triumphant Lord. Our world boasts of great, comprehensive knowledge. Still, that world may not be able to fraternize with the free spirit of Christ until it learns, with Francis, to take the Master seriously instead of reserving for him its lip service.

The Bible which Francis loved and through which he discovered Jesus was one to be felt and lived, as well as to be heard and read. He learned from it what the most rigid scholarship ought to demonstrate and what critical acumen alone cannot grasp. He discovered that the Bible is a way open to life, not the history of the dead; it is a high adventure still in the process of fulfillment, not an episode that is closed; it is the inbreathing of the divine spirit, not the relaxation of despair. Our age cannot well accept *in toto* the biblical approach of the Poverello. It can well afford to experience with him the real, inescapable vitality of the Book.

Francis' conception of the church embraced the largest aspects of human life. He welcomed gladly its institutional power and discipline, but he saw in it even more joyously the everlasting community of those dedicated to God throughout the ages. His unwavering faith in it as the undefeated and invincible agency of God's salvation, as the timeless society of God's redeemed, holds inspiration for any age. He was an obedient son of the Roman Church. His living challenge and warm companionship are not limited to that communion. His true catholicity, his self-effacing love, and his inflexible loyalty to Christ's absolute demands are the heritage of all Christians. Such must be the animating qualities of all who would know the unity of participating fellowship with God and his saints.¹⁸

Our world ought certainly to have surmounted some of the

¹⁸ Heiler, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-61.

human weaknesses and the manifold incapacities of the poor man of Assisi. It surely has not risen to his appreciation of man's place in the wholeness of God's universe. Perhaps the mastery of sciences and the multiplication of techniques do not spell true wisdom. What Francis discerned of life's ultimates—of God, His Son, His Bible, His Church, and His World—may actually become instructive to people so sophisticated as we. It may be that we shall learn, after all, the secret of Francis' power. Our world may yet discover through renunciation the true riches of the divine fullness; it may one day pass through the doors of love and humility into the glories of God's peace.

OF HOLY POVERTY

O Love of Holy Poverty!
Thou Kingdom of Tranquillity.

Poverty whose path is safe and clear,
Hath no griefs, nor rancour, sheds no tears,
Nor of robber hands hath any fear,
Tempests cannot trouble Poverty.

Poverty can die in perfect peace;
Maketh neither will, nor bond, nor lease.
Leaves the world behind, and lies at ease,
And around her strife can never be.

Poverty, High Wisdom deep and sure,
Unsubdued by earth and earthly lure,
Scorns created things, detached and pure,
Scorning, yet pursuing utterly.

He whose wants are master is a slave,
Sells himself for what his longings crave,
Him his purchased riches cannot save,
He hath bargained very foolishly.

Mortal courage sure must hesitate,
Think and turn from such a vassal state,
Where God's image, beautiful and great,
Is debased and changed to vanity.

In a narrow heart God cannot bide:
Where the love is great, the heart is wide;
Poverty great-hearted, dignified,
Entertains and welcomes Deity.

Ah! where Christ is grafted on the spray,
All the withered wood is cut away;
See, the freshness springing from decay!
Changing to a wondrous Unity.

Love, that lives and breathes without Desire,
Wisdom, freed from Thought's consuming fire;
Will, at one with God, that doth aspire
But to obey Him in simplicity.

Lo, I live! yet not myself alone;
I am I, yet am I not mine own;
And this change, cross-wise obscure, unknown,
Language cannot tell its mystery.

Poverty hath nothing in her hand,
Nothing craves, in sea, or sky, or land:
Hath the Universe at her command!
Dwelling in the heart of liberty.¹⁹

¹⁹ From an English translation of Jacopone da Todi in *The Little Brown Company: An Anthology of Franciscan Poetry and Prose Gathered by Louis Vincent* (London, 1925), pp. 3-4. Acknowledgment of thanks is made for permission to reproduce this poem, the copyright to which has been held by the Talbot Press, Dublin, Ireland, Martin Hopkinson and Co., Ltd., London, England, and their successors, John Lane The Bodley Head Ltd., London.

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